

OPERA OMNIA VOL. IV.2

RAIMON PANIKKAR

HINDUISM

PART TWO
The Dharma of India

Opera Omnia

Volume IV

Hinduism

Part Two

The Dharma of India

Opera Omnia

I. Mysticism and Spirituality

Part 1: Mysticism, Fullness of Life

Part 2: Spirituality, the Way of Life

II. Religion and Religions

III. Christianity

Part 1: The Christian Tradition (1961–1967)

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IV. Hinduism

Part 1: The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari

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V. Buddhism

VI. Cultures and Religions in Dialogue

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VII. Hinduism and Christianity

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IX. Mystery and Hermeneutics

Part 1: Myth, Symbol, and Ritual

Part 2: Faith, Hermeneutics, and Word

X. Philosophy and Theology

Part 1: The Rhythm of Being

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XI. Sacred Secularity

XII. Space, Time, and Science

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SERIES FOREWORD

All the writings it is my privilege and responsibility to present in this series are not the fruit of mere speculation but, rather, autobiographical—that is, they were first inspired by a life and praxis that have been only subsequently molded into writing.

This *Opera Omnia* ranges over a span of some seventy years, during which I dedicated myself to exploring further the meaning of a more justified and fulfilled human lifetime. I did not live for the sake of writing, but I wrote to live in a more conscious way so as to help my fellows with thoughts not only from my own mind but also springing from a superior Source, which may perhaps be called Spirit—although I do not claim that my writings are in any way inspired. However, I do not believe that we are isolated monads, but that each of us is a microcosm that mirrors and impacts the macrocosm of reality as a whole—as most cultures believed when they spoke of the Body of Śiva, the communion of the saints, the Mystical Body, *karman*, and so forth.

The decision to publish this collection of my writings has been somewhat trying, and more than once I have had to overcome the temptation to abandon the attempt, the reason being that, though I fully subscribe to the Latin saying *scripta manent*, I also firmly believe that what actually matters in the final analysis is to live out Life, as witnessed by the great masters who, as Thomas Aquinas remarks in the *Summa* about Pythagoras and Socrates (but not about Buddha, of whom he could not have known), did not write a single word.

In the twilight of life I found myself in a dark forest, for the straight path had been lost and I had shed all my certainties. It is undoubtedly to the merit of Sante Bagnoli, and of his publishing house Jaca Book, that I owe the initiative of bringing out this *Opera Omnia*, and all my gratitude goes to him. This work includes practically all that has appeared in book form, although some chapters have been inserted into different volumes as befitted their topics. Numerous articles have been added to present a more complete picture of my way of thinking, but occasional pieces and almost all my interviews have been left out.

I would like to make some practical comments which apply to all the volumes:

1. In quoting references, I have preferred to cite my previously published works following the general scheme of my publications.
2. Subject matter rather than chronology has been considered in the selection, and thus the style may sometimes appear uneven.
3. Even if each of these works aspires to be a self-sufficient whole, some ideas recur because they are functional to understanding the text, although the avoidance of unnecessary duplication has led to a number of omissions.
4. The publisher's preference for the *Opera Omnia* to be put into an organic whole by the author while still alive has many obvious positive features. Should the author outlive the printer's run, however, he will be hard put to help himself from introducing alterations, revisions, or merely adding to his original written works.

I thank my various translators, who have rendered the various languages I have happened to write in into the spirit of multiculturalism—which I believe is ever relevant in a world

where cultures encounter each other in mutual enrichment, provided they do not mislay their specificity. I am particularly grateful to Milena Carrara Pavan, to whom I have entrusted the publication of all my written works, which she knows deeply, having been at my side in dedication and sensitivity during the last twenty years of my life.

R.P.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Hindū Scriptures

<i>A</i>	<i>Āraṇyaka</i>
<i>AA</i>	<i>Aitareya Āraṇyaka</i>
<i>AB</i>	<i>Aitareya-brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>AGS</i>	<i>Āśvālāyana Gṛhya Sūtra</i>
<i>ApSS</i>	<i>Āpastarnbiya Srauta Sūtra</i>
<i>AU</i>	<i>Aitareya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>AV</i>	<i>Atharva-veda</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Brahmaṇa</i>
<i>BG</i>	<i>Bhagavad-gītā</i>
<i>BGS</i>	<i>Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra</i>
<i>BhagP</i>	<i>Bhāgavata Purāṇa</i>
<i>BP</i>	<i>Brahma-purāṇa</i>
<i>BrDev</i>	<i>Bṛhad Devatā</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Brahma Sūtra</i>
<i>BSB</i>	<i>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</i>
<i>BU</i>	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad</i>
<i>BUB</i>	<i>Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya</i>
<i>CU</i>	<i>Chāndogya-upaniṣad</i>
<i>GopB</i>	<i>Gopatha Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gṛhya Sūtra</i>
<i>HGS</i>	<i>Hiranyakeśi Gṛhya Sūtra</i>
<i>IsU</i>	<i>Īśa-upaniṣad</i>
<i>JabU</i>	<i>Jābāla-upaniṣad</i>
<i>JaimUB</i>	<i>Jaiminiya-upaniṣad-brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>KaivU</i>	<i>Kaivalya-upaniṣad</i>
<i>KarnPar</i>	<i>Mahābhārata Karna-parvan</i>
<i>KathU</i>	<i>Kaṭha-upaniṣad</i>
<i>KausB</i>	<i>Kauṣītaki-brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>KausU</i>	<i>Kauṣītaki-upaniṣad</i>
<i>KenU</i>	<i>Kena-upaniṣad</i>
<i>KenUB</i>	<i>Kena-upaniṣad-bhāṣya</i>
<i>MahanarU</i>	<i>Mānārāyaṇa-upaniṣad</i>
<i>MaitB</i>	<i>Maitri Brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>MaitS</i>	<i>Maitrāyaṇi Saṁhitā</i>
<i>MaitU</i>	<i>Maitrī-upaniṣad</i>

<i>MandU</i>	<i>Māṇḍūkya-upaniṣad</i>
<i>Manu</i>	<i>Mānava-dharmaśāstra</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
<i>MundU</i>	<i>Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad</i>
<i>NarS</i>	<i>Nārada-sūtra</i>
<i>NS</i>	<i>Nyāya Sūtra</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>Purāṇa</i>
<i>PaingU</i>	<i>Paingala-upaniṣad</i>
<i>PGS</i>	<i>Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra</i>
<i>PranagniU</i>	<i>Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad</i>
<i>PrasnU</i>	<i>Prasna Upaniṣad</i>
<i>Ram</i>	<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>
<i>PVB</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśa-brahmaṇa</i>
<i>R</i>	<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>
<i>RV</i>	<i>Ṛg-veda</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>Saṁhitā</i>
<i>SantPar</i>	<i>Mahābhārata Śānti-parvan</i>
<i>SB</i>	<i>Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>SGS</i>	<i>Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra</i>
<i>SivPur</i>	<i>Śiva-purāṇa</i>
<i>SSS</i>	<i>Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra</i>
<i>SU</i>	<i>Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad</i>
<i>SubU</i>	<i>Subala-upaniṣad</i>
<i>SuryU</i>	<i>Sūrya Upaniṣad</i>
<i>SV</i>	<i>Sāma Veda</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>TMB</i>	<i>Tāṇḍya-mahā-brāhmaṇa</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Taittirīya Saṁhitā</i>
<i>TU</i>	<i>Taittirīya-upaniṣad</i>
<i>VanP</i>	<i>Mahābhārata Vana-parvan</i>
<i>VasDhSas</i>	<i>Vasiṣṭha-dharma-śāstra</i>
<i>VeSa</i>	<i>Vedānta-sāra</i>
<i>VisnuP</i>	<i>Viṣṇu-purāṇa</i>
<i>YS</i>	<i>Yoga Sūtra</i>
<i>YSB</i>	<i>Yoga Sūtra Bhāṣya</i>
<i>YV</i>	<i>Yajur Veda (Vājasaneyi Saṁhitā)</i>
	<i>Christian Scriptures</i>
<i>Ac</i>	<i>Acts</i>
<i>Acts</i>	<i>Acts of the Apostles</i>
<i>Col</i>	<i>Colossians</i>
<i>Dan</i>	<i>Book of Daniel</i>

<i>Dt</i>	<i>Deuteronomy</i>
<i>Eccl</i>	<i>Ecclesiastes</i>
<i>Ecclus</i>	<i>Book of Ecclesiasticus</i>
<i>Ep</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>
<i>Eph</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>
<i>Ex</i>	<i>Exodus</i>
<i>Ez</i>	<i>Book of Ezekiel</i>
<i>4 Ezra</i>	<i>Fourth Ezra</i>
<i>Gal</i>	<i>Galatians</i>
<i>Gen</i>	<i>Genesis</i>
<i>Hab</i>	<i>Habakkuk</i>
<i>Hag</i>	<i>Haggai</i>
<i>Heb</i>	<i>Letter to the Hebrews</i>
<i>Hos</i>	<i>Hosea</i>
<i>Is</i>	<i>Isaiah</i>
<i>Isa</i>	<i>Book of Isaiah</i>
<i>Jas</i>	<i>James</i>
<i>Jb</i>	<i>Job</i>
<i>Jg</i>	<i>Judges</i>
<i>Jn</i>	<i>John</i>
<i>Jon</i>	<i>Jonah</i>
<i>Jos</i>	<i>Joshua</i>
<i>Jr</i>	<i>Jeremiah</i>
<i>Lc</i>	<i>Luke</i>
<i>Lk</i>	<i>Luke</i>
<i>Lv</i>	<i>Leviticus</i>
<i>Mc</i>	<i>Micah</i>
<i>Mk</i>	<i>Mark</i>
<i>Mt</i>	<i>Matthew</i>
<i>Nb</i>	<i>Numbers</i>
<i>1 Cor</i>	<i>First Letter to the Corinthians</i>
<i>1 Jn</i>	<i>First Letter of St. John</i>
<i>1 Kgs</i>	<i>First Book of Kings</i>
<i>1 Pet</i>	<i>First Letter of Peter</i>
<i>1 Sam</i>	<i>First Samuel</i>
<i>1 Th</i>	<i>First Letter to the Thessalonians</i>
<i>1 Tim</i>	<i>First Letter of Timothy</i>
<i>Ph</i>	<i>Philippians</i>
<i>Phlm</i>	<i>Philemon</i>
<i>Pr</i>	<i>Proverbs</i>
<i>Ps</i>	<i>Book of Psalms</i>
<i>Qo</i>	<i>Qohelet</i>
<i>Rev</i>	<i>Revelation</i>

<i>Rom</i>	<i>Letter to the Romans</i>
<i>Sir</i>	<i>Sirach</i>
<i>Song</i>	<i>Song of Songs</i>
<i>Tt</i>	<i>Titus</i>
<i>2 Cor</i>	<i>Second Letter to the Corinthians</i>
<i>2 Jn</i>	<i>Second Letter of St. John</i>
<i>2 Kgs</i>	<i>Second Book of Kings</i>
<i>2 Mac</i>	<i>Second Maccabees</i>
<i>2 Pet</i>	<i>2 Peter</i>
<i>2 Tim</i>	<i>Second Letter of Timothy</i>
<i>3 Jn</i>	<i>Third Letter of St. John</i>
<i>Ws</i>	<i>Wisdom</i>
<i>Zech</i>	<i>Book of Zechariah</i>

Others

<i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Irenaeus, Adversus haereses</i>
<i>AV</i>	<i>Authorized Version</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>Biblia catalana</i>
<i>BJ</i>	<i>Bible de Jérusalem</i>
<i>Bod</i>	<i>Bodhicaryavatara</i>
<i>Caes.</i>	<i>Plutarch, Caesar</i>
<i>Categ.</i>	<i>Aristotle, Categories</i>
<i>C. gentes.</i>	<i>Thomas Aquinas, Contra gentiles</i>
<i>CHI</i>	<i>The Cultural Heritage of India</i>
<i>CIC</i>	<i>Codex Iuris Canonici (Code of Canon Law)</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Augustine, Confessions</i>
<i>De div. nom.</i>	<i>Dionysius, De Divinis Nominibus ("On the Divine Names")</i>
<i>De myst. theol.</i>	<i>Dionysius, De mystica theologica ("On Mystical Theology")</i>
<i>Denz.</i>	<i>Heinrich Denzinger, Enchiridion Symbolorum</i>
<i>Denz.-Schön.</i>	<i>H.J.D. Denzinger, Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, A. Schönmetzer (ed.), Herder, Barcinone 1973.</i>
<i>De sacram.</i>	<i>Ambrose, De sacramentis</i>
<i>Dom. VIII post Pentec.</i>	<i>Roman Missal, Eighth Sunday after Pentecost</i>
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Basil, Letters of St. Basil of Caesarea</i>
<i>Epist. ad Eph.</i>	<i>Ignatius Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians</i>
<i>Epist. ad Parthos</i>	<i>Augustine, In Epistolam Joannis Ad Parthos Tractatus Decem</i>
<i>Epist. in I Cor.</i>	<i>John Chrysostom</i>
<i>ERE</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</i>

<i>Ex Officio Smi. Sti</i>	<i>Ex Officio Smi. Sti. Ati n. 71</i>
<i>Expos. in Ioan.</i>	<i>Eckhart, In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus</i>
<i>Frægm.</i>	<i>Heraclitus, Fragments</i>
<i>Frægm.</i>	<i>Philolaus of Kroton, Fragments</i>
<i>Homil. Pasch.</i>	<i>Cyril of Alexandria, Homilia Paschalis</i>
<i>In Cant.</i>	<i>Bernard, In Canticum Canticorum Expositiæ</i>
<i>In Ezech.</i>	<i>St. Gregory the Great, Homilia in Ezechielem</i>
<i>In Iohan.</i>	<i>Augustine, In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus</i>
<i>In Iohan.</i>	<i>Cyril of Alexandria, In Iohannis Evangelium</i>
<i>I Sent.</i>	<i>Bonaventure, Commentaria in quatuor Libros Sententiarum</i>
<i>KJ</i>	<i>King James Version</i>
<i>Knox</i>	<i>Knox Bible</i>
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Aristotle, Metaphysics</i>
<i>MK</i>	<i>Mûlamadhyamaka-karika</i>
<i>NAB</i>	<i>New American Bible</i>
<i>Nácar Colunga</i>	<i>Nácar-Colunga Bible</i>
<i>NEB</i>	<i>New English Bible</i>
<i>NJB</i>	<i>New Jerusalem Bible</i>
<i>NRSV</i>	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>J.-P. Migne, Patrologiæ Cursus Completus. Series Graeca, Paris, 1857–1866</i>
<i>Phileb.</i>	<i>Plato, Philebus</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Aristotle, Physics</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>J.-P. Migne, Patrologiæ Cursus Completus. Series Latina, Paris, 1844–1855</i>
<i>Quæst. Disp.</i>	
<i>de Pot. Dei</i>	<i>Thomas Aquinas, Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei</i>
<i>RGG</i>	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>RSV</i>	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
<i>RV</i>	<i>Revised Version</i>
<i>Serm.</i>	<i>Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermones de diversis</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Samyutta Nikaya</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Clement of Alexandria, Stromata</i>
<i>Sum. theol.</i>	<i>Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiæ</i>
<i>Theat.</i>	<i>Plato, Theætetus</i>

INTRODUCTION¹

By the *dharma* of Hinduism we mean its spirituality. This volume includes a whole book on this subject. But what do we mean by Hinduism?

To write about Hinduism in an understandable way I will start from the fundamental experience by which Man is Man and not a cat, a tree, or a stone, even if he is in deep relation to them. Without this fundamental human experience (which we have frequently covered up by the encrustations of civilization and the dust of history) there is the risk of not interpreting other religions correctly. The first step toward avoiding this risk is to respect what I have called the golden hermeneutic rule, that is, that what is interpreted recognizes itself in the interpretation. If I describe Jews or Shintoists in a way in which they cannot recognize themselves, it means that my description is not correct.

In the case of Hinduism the most difficult aspect is to synthesize such a rich experience. There are two essential considerations to be made. The first consists in criticizing the belief that one can describe reality adequately, almost as though it were transparently comprehensible and suited to the word, as though the ineffable were merely a human weakness. The second consideration also debunks a modern conviction: the belief that time is extrinsic to things, and therefore that events may be summed up and catalogued in a shorter or faster time scale. An example will help us avoid the metaphysical problem of the relationship between thinking, speaking, and being, on the one hand, and time and reality, on the other. If I am to speak of Hinduism, I must do so as a Hindū—without however forgetting the other traditions.

In the first century BC, Rabbi Hillel was asked how to summarize the entire Law and the words of the prophets, and he gave a brilliant answer: “Do as you would be done by.” Similar questions were put to Jesus and to Mohammed. With today’s information overload, people are asked to express in a minute what may have taken years of reflection. Naturally, one can reduce Christianity to loving others as oneself, Judaism to its first formulation on God,² Islam to the tenet that the one God is Allah and Mohammed is His prophet, just as the Theory of Relativity can be reduced to the formula $E = mc^2$, but actually reality is much more complex.

This procedure, however, is not applicable to Hinduism: there is no principle it can be reduced to; its essence cannot be put into words. Hinduism does not have an *essence* and cannot be reduced to any principle. There is no “Hindū principle.” Unlike many religions, it does not have a founder, and indeed it does not even have a name. When we say “Hinduism” we are already classifying from the outside. In fact “Hinduism” is a Persian term that was coined long after its origins to distinguish it from other existing religions. Hindūs did not call themselves Hindūs, and even today it is more a political than a religious term. The fact that it has neither a name nor a founder is significant in itself.

But that is not all: it does not have an essence. A nonbeliever can be Hindū just as a monotheist or a polytheist can be a good Hindū, as well as who goes regularly to the temple and who does not. A believer in God can be a Hindū, but so can a nonbeliever. Because

¹ From “El espíritu del Hinduismo,” in *Religión y cultura* 41, no. 192 (1995): 21–32. Translated by Carla Ros.

² The *Shemah*: “Listen, Israel! The Lord your God is One,” etc. [n.d.r.].

Hinduism does not have an essence, we will never grasp its nature by referring to the world of ideas.

On the other hand, Hinduism does have an *existence*, and those who cannot perceive it as a naked existence (without endowing it with the attributes of essences), or are unable to overcome Plato's paradigm (to stay in the more direct Western traditions), one will not be able to understand what Hinduism is.

What is this specific existence of Hinduism? The question is in itself equivocal, because the very question about *one's specific* existence is an essentialist question. I could get around the question by saying that Hindūs do not ask themselves how they are different from others, but rather live out their identity for the identity itself and not for the difference—but to explain this would need too much digression. I will simply give an elementary answer without going into greater detail.

Hindū is the one who accepts his or her *karman* and recognizes his or her *dharma*. *Karman* means "to do, action," and *dharma* could be translated as "duty" and "religion." The concept of religion is alien to Hinduism; it does not consider itself a religion in the modern Western sense of the word, which is essentially based on the Abrahamic traditions.

Having said this, I could briefly add that a large proportion of modern thinkers and writers who belong to this group—or minor groups—of human traditions that we will classify under the name of Hinduism describe it as *sanātana-dharma*, that is, endless *dharma*, *dharma* as primordial *dharma* common to the whole of humanity; *dharma* being the collective participation of all in the duty of maintaining cohesion in the world. *Lokasamgraha* is what the *Bhagavad-gītā* (III.20) calls it. The role of the sage is to participate consciously and voluntarily in the maintaining of unity in the world, to prevent it from falling apart (BG III.25). And *sanātana-dharma* is the tradition discovering its own task as that of participating in the dynamism of the cosmos, so that it does not disintegrate into a thousand pieces owing to its centripetal force. This could be an approximate self-understanding of what can be called Hinduism. Although it may seem paradoxical, in this way Hinduism is very close to many of the primordial African "religions," which intend "religion" as the fullness of Man.

Some Hindū Traditions

Below are three examples of insights that are grouped under the name of Hinduism. They are three examples of the life and mindset of the traditions that come under this name. The first example is drawn from the *Rg-veda*, the second from the *Upaniṣads*, and the third from an *Śaivāgama* (writings of the śivaist tradition).

"I Do Not Know Who I Am" (*Veda*)

This is a text from the first book of the *Rg-veda*, probably written around 1800 BC, but others say around the year 2000 BC or even earlier. The text is a quatrain of hymn number 164 of the first book. Stanza 37 says,

What I am, I do not know.
I wander alone, oppressed by my mind.
After the First-born of the Truth has come to me,
I participate in that same Word.

I can only sum up the content and make some brief references to my book *The Vedic Experience*. How would a *paṇḍit* explain “I do not know who I am” to children? Self-consciousness, both mine and that of humanity, awakens in knowing that we do not know who we are. The great wisdom, which can be attained by Man, is the knowledge of his own ignorance. The knowledge of ignorance is the deepest knowledge that one can have of reality without distorting it; it is the nonviolent knowledge of how things flow. Man is an enigma to himself. The text does not ask “who I am,” only then to say it does not know. Rather, it tells us who we are. We are those who definitely know that we do not know who we are.

I am a pilgrim on my way, but the *homo viator* does not know where he goes; he does not know the final destination. Faith is a risk. He has faith in God who guides him. Our traveller does not worry about the destination either. What burdens him is the path in itself. I am a pilgrim with the knowledge of my limits; my walking is not a walking without boundaries; there are limits. It is walking, not flying. The limits, however, are not merely material or physical. I go with the burden and the responsibility of my mind. The mind, thought, consciousness itself, are a burden and a responsibility.

The mental burden of the *manas* is really a burden.³ I am aware of the corrosive power of the mind, which not only modifies all that it touches, but in the end destroys it as well. Man has known for millennia that the mind modifies the “minded”—that thought changes what has been thought or observation the observed, without needing to wait until 1927 when it was stated by Heisenberg in terms of modern physics. Nevertheless, in this case we are speaking of something more: the destructive power of the mind, of the “original sin” of knowledge, of the loss of innocence that is born of self-awareness. If we think exhaustively about God, an atom, love, justice, or a chair, we will end up not knowing what God or an atom or love, justice or a chair really are.

And yet, the awareness of the limits somehow transcends both the limits and the awareness. This leads to the birth of responsibility. It is a *responsibility* since by becoming aware of things I irreparably transform them, but I cannot help doing so. I am still talking like a *paṇḍit*: even if every form of knowledge that is reached through the mind has the mind itself as the tool, and every tool is mediation, and every mediation is indirect and, consequently, I distort everything I touch . . . it would seem that I cannot, would not, and must not disregard this knowledge: it would mean renouncing my human dignity. Knowing perhaps alters reality, but it is the first means I have for entering into contact with it. In that moment I am faced with the responsibility concerning the use of that for which I am a human being: the mind. A large proportion of Indic speculation, especially in latter times, but which constantly refers to the *Vedas*, is guided by this search for a knowledge that is more than just objective: an experience that saves us, fulfills us, and makes us real.

The second couplet appears as a hope, or better, opens the door to a faith. It speaks of the “Firstborn,” of the *rta*, of the order, the truth, the *dharma*, and of reality. This implies a whole *kosmology*, which differs from current Western cosmology with its scientific origin. It refers to a reality that we do not see and do not experience as substance but as cosmic order, universal love, truth in the making,⁴ which is dynamic, fertile, which has a firstborn. If we want to find a homomorphic equivalent, we should cite the Christian Trinity (which includes Creation and Incarnation) before turning to Neoplatonic emanations.

³ Original text *The Vedic Experience Mantramajari* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Now Volume IV.1 of *Opera Omnia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016).

⁴ With a reference to the Semitic and New Testament expression “to make the truth.” [n. ed.].

When I am confronted with the Firstborn of reality, of truth, of the primordial order, I participate and rejoice in the Word itself. Man is not so much *Homo loquens* as *Homo locutus*, not so much Man who speaks but rather Man who is spoken to. Speaking is not so much a matter of being able to speak but of being able to understand the word. A dumb person, even though he cannot speak, is nevertheless fully a Man. Those who cannot understand anything of what is said to them, those who cannot be spoken to, are deeply damaged in their humanness.

"I participate in that same Word." What does this mean? One of the *Vedas* (*Tāndya-mahā-brāhmaṇa* XX.14.2) says, "In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was divine." This word is divine precisely because it speaks, and we are human beings precisely because we understand the word. To take part in the living word: this is how—to use a Greek term—Man participates in the whole cosmotheandric adventure. Adam must have known something about this to give a name to all things. But I shall refrain from making comparisons.

This power of the primordial word characterizes the *Vedas*. It has been synthesized into one word by tradition: *apauruṣeya*. *Puruṣa* means Man, *apuruṣa* means non-Man, *apauruṣeya* is the adjectival form of non-Man. According to tradition, from the beginning the *Vedas* are *apauruṣeya*; in other words, they have no author. *Apauruṣeytva*, or the nonhuman authorship of the *Vedas*, is what gives them their . . . sacred nature? Revealed? Definitions of this kind are not very appropriate. What does it mean that the *Vedas* have no author? Can this be due to the fact that for many years the *Vedas* did not have a written form? (Incidentally, we should remember that more mistakes have always been made in the transcription of texts than in their oral transmission.) Does this mean that they were not written by anybody? This fact has given rise to derision in many books on Indology, even the most well-informed. On the other hand, we are well aware that even the most sophisticated information technology has viruses!

The fact that the *Vedas* do not have an author does not mean that there has never been a first time in which someone wrote them down or recited them. It means that the Vedic word is a primordial word, without intermediaries, and that I can understand it directly without the mediation of someone explaining it to me. If I have to ask the meaning of something, one will explain A by saying B. Who will explain B to me? And C? At some point I will have to stop. By contrast, words that do not need an intermediary, that reveal their own meaning, are primordial words, but they require meditation. This is why the *Vedas* are not the books or the scrolls, but the recital. The recital is not the sound of a tape recorder; it is not recital unless there is a speaker who believes in what he is reciting. And one is not a believer if one asks *what* the words mean or *why* one must believe in their meaning. One believes when one believes. If there is a *why* behind it all, then one believes in this *why* more than one believes in the contents. Faith is beyond any kind of *why*. Therefore it has a saving power in itself.

The word exceeds the limits of the mind. To reach this experience, Hinduism opens to us the third dimension alongside the sensory and the intellectual dimension—that is, the mystic dimension.

Fullness (Upaniṣad)

The second example is made up of two parts. The first refers to an *Upaniṣad* that is among those better known and also seen as one of the most important: the *Īśa-upaniṣad*. It is also one of the shortest as it consists of only eighteen verses. This *Upaniṣad* begins with a famous invocation that is recited at the beginning of many Hindū liturgical functions. Here is the translation:

That is Fullness, this is Fullness,
 Fullness comes to fullness.
 When fullness is taken from Fullness,
 Fullness remains.

There may be various interpretations: *brahman* is immanent and transcends totality; reality has neither an inside nor an outside; quantitative thought cannot be applied to reality; neither creationism nor emanationism; the *plêrôma* is not dialectical, and so on. All this introduces us to the profound depths of Hindū culture.

In the second part of this second example I comment on the first verse of this short *Upaniṣad*, summarizing what I wrote in an essay called *Some Aspects of Hindū Spirituality*. All Hindūs know it by heart: *iśāvāsyam idam sarvaṃ* . . . In translation:

This whole universe, all that lives
 and moves on earth, is enveloped by the Lord.
 Therefore find joy in abandoning the transient.
 Do not hanker after another Man's lot.

All appears to be penetrated, enveloped, impregnated inside and out by the divine Mystery. This is not pantheism (monism) nor panentheism (where God is just the matrix from which all arises), but intimates what I have called cosmotheandric intuition: the World, God, and Man pervade each other, without being identical.

The fruit of this intuition is joy. Joy is the experience of fullness, of the fullness (*pūrṇa*) mentioned and described by the invocation above. And yet, this joy springs from renunciation (*tyāga*). This is a fundamental notion in Hindū spirituality. Paradoxically, the text says that one should find joy in renunciation or, better, *through* renunciation (*tyaktena bhun̄jītha*). If we ignored the first verse, we could fall victim to a Freudian interpretation, either sadistic or masochistic. Nothing could be further from its spirit or letter.

Since everything is impregnated with the Divine, discovering the appearance is the wise discernment of positive renunciation. When we speak of renunciation in a Hindū context, we do not mean abandoning something (good) because we cannot have it. If I do not appropriate a gold watch I find on the table because I am afraid of the police, or of hell, or of strangers who could observe me, or so as not to diminish the high opinion that I have of myself, or for any other reason, I am not really renouncing but simply holding back because the risk is too high. To be able to renounce, I must be aware that that watch has no value *for me*, and that consequently I can do without it because *for me* (not in the abstract) it has no positive meaning and thus no value.

Renunciation in Hinduism is the equivalent of abandonment (from *tyaj*) of that which for me is devoid of value. Therefore it will not give rise to any kind of pain. Renunciation is not renunciation for a higher good, nor is it the result of a calculation "à la Pascal" or any kind of profitable "stock exchange." Here we have a new example of what I have called *diatopic hermeneutics*. The Hindūs who renounce, in fact, renounce nothing: they renounce the nullity that represents for them what they have renounced. Otherwise, how could I feel joy for having renounced something positive? That would be masochism. The relationship is personal, and therefore renunciation means that what I am renouncing has no positive value for me. Obviously, all this requires a personal process of purification.

The *Upaniṣad* tells us that everything is impregnated and penetrated by the Divine, and that one finds joy in the freedom from all obstacles, in renunciation: not to hoard or desire nor crave what belongs to others, since it represents nothing good for us.

Mā gridhaḥ, says the text: do not aspire, do not crave, do not appropriate. *Aparigraha* (probably with the same etymology) is one of the words used by Mahātmā Gandhi during his political campaign: do not appropriate, nor exploit, nor accumulate; do not waste and do not egoistically ask for yourself what would infringe on human, social, economic, or cosmic equilibrium. This is the freedom of those who cling to nothing. This second text takes us into the true sphere of Hinduism, describing the life and the heartbeat of a tradition from inside. *Mokṣa*, liberation, personal freedom is the supreme value, the last of the famous *puruṣārthas* or human values. The others are love, well-being, and duty (*kāma*, *artha*, and *dharma*).

Everything Is in Relation with Everything Else (śivaism)

We mention the third text only briefly. It is an *Saivāgama*, an *āgama*, a sacred script that is no longer Vedic. It is an *āgama* written after the *Bhagavad-gītā*, probably in the first century BC. It is a *śivaist* text that sets out the principle or leitmotif of more than one school of thought. It recites, *sarvam sarvātmakam*: “everything is in relation with everything else.” This is the fundamental principle of almost all the traditional cosmologies: reality is a whole, an organism of basic harmony, with the possibility of more or less intense disharmonies.

The word *sarvam* (all) is akin to what we call salvation. Salvation is fullness, everything, fulfilment. If we want to know what *karman* is, the problem of “reincarnation,” of salvation, and so on, the fundamental principle is rooted in the fact that everything is in relation with everything else. Nothing exists in isolation; so also the *kaivalya* of a *yogic* spirituality, which leads us to be increasingly more ourselves and apparently separate from others, unites us more deeply with reality. All things are in relation with one another. All is in all—not only us existing in the here and now. Everything: the visible and the invisible, the divine, the human and the infra-human. God is not *au dessus de la mêlée*, outside of everything, separate. God is also part of this mutual permeation of everything. Things cannot be isolated, because in isolation they have no reality. Specialization, or rather fragmented knowledge, is a mistake unless one recognizes that the fragment is real only insofar as it is part of everything. Every real being is a microcosm and a *mikrotheos*: an image of the whole of reality, where human beings are a mirror seeing the image of God.

Final Reflections

These three texts, because of the authority they have (from the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads* and *śivaism*), draw us into the true atmosphere of this series of traditions that we call Hinduism. A few brief considerations will suffice to conclude.

It is not possible to understand Hinduism by comparing it to the modern Western concept of religion. It does not correspond to the attributes of a religion as conceived in the Western world. When we use the word “religion,” we project a series of parameters and—by so doing—we try to understand certain human experiences that however transcend our own self-understanding. Nevertheless, in order to understand other forms of life or spirituality we cannot avoid applying our categories. There are two solutions: either to abandon the word “religion” or to expand it to include other forms of human experience. This is one of the most important intercultural problems of our times. The scientific mentality pushes us to extrapolate and search for universal parameters. But perhaps Reality will not be reduced to universal parameters.

On the other hand, if we do not define Hinduism as a religion, how else can we define it? We cannot call it "culture" in the modern sense of the word. The term *culture* has had its present-day meaning since the eighteenth century, when it lost its genitive sense (*culture of*). And Hinduism comprises dozens of cultures in the modern sense.

We are faced with a latent political problem and fundamentally a question of power: the politics of words. Although the Anglo-Saxon influence is quite clear, the issue is more far-reaching. Is it still possible to define "religion" (from Latin *re-ligare*) as an experience that does not *bind*, but *unbinds*, frees? Encountering other religions means discovering new worlds; we should not repeat the mistake made in America five centuries ago!

Nor can we claim that it is a new worldview. We do not discover a "new" religion in the way that the Spanish believed that they had discovered a new continent. We are not dealing with a new *worldview* but with another *world*. What Hinduism is really showing us is another world that is different from our own, however open it may be. Until we are able to see and experience other realities, our intercultural visions will always be intracultural, always within our own conception of the world. We have referred to the consciousness of limits that the *Rg-veda* speaks of. The mind by which we are limited is both concrete and personal; it is a cultural mind. A complete all-round perspective is not possible; it would not be perspective, not a viewpoint.

The world of Hinduism opens up an extraordinarily rich human experience, which shakes up not so much our vision of the world but the world itself in which we live. It relativizes the actual meaning of reality, and the fact that we have confused *relativity* with *relativism* is what has led to the tragic misunderstanding between many religions. This lack of experience means that, when two religions meet face-to-face, they persecute and hold each other in contempt, and therefore cannot really meet.

I stress, once again, that it is not a matter of two different conceptions of the *same* reality but of two *different* realities. We need to realize that we are merely encountering a reality that does not correspond to ours. (This is a legitimate vision, but which has no reason to be a model for the whole of reality.) Elsewhere I have spoken of the congenital crypto-Kantism of modernity, that is, as if it were a matter of only one world, of a single *Ding an sich*, which Christians, atheists, Hindūs, and so on supposedly see, hear, and interpret in different ways. I repeat that they are different worlds, and not only perspectives, or more or less Kantian categories through which we come closer to the *noumenon*. Such a *noumenon* does not exist. Reality appears in appearance. The appearance is actually the appearance *of* reality; it is its symbol. What is symbolized can be found (discovered) in the symbol; it "is" the symbol, but to confuse the symbol with what is symbolized is *avidyā*, ignorance.

Those who have meditated on the above-mentioned first text of the *Rg-veda* will have realized the value of ignorance, of not knowing, and are ready to free themselves of every absolutism without falling into agnosticism. By understanding that we are limited by the mind, we can discover that there are other worlds in which we can participate because, as we have already said, everything is in relation with everything else. However, this bond is not reason. In the Christian tradition the bond is the Spirit; in the Hindū tradition it is *brahman*.

This intercultural and interreligious task is an unavoidable necessity for the next millennium, and it heralds heavy storms from the West. But as the *Vedas* tell us: Believe in the dawn!

*

The first section includes the book of the same title, *The Dharma of Hinduism*, in which the *dharma* is described not only as a real ontological order but also as a system which is extrinsic to the nature of things.

The second section consists in various articles on Indian theology and philosophy while the third concentrates more on present day problems and the important role which India could play in the world of today as an alternative to technological society so long as it does not become overwhelmed and is able to be inspired by its ancestral richness for a new civilization. A hitherto unpublished essay (*Indra's Cunning*), which I wrote many years ago but was unable to finish yet feel is still valid from this perspective, is also included.

SECTION I

HINDŪ SPIRITUALITY

Sanātana-dharma

*satyae vada
dharmae cara
svādhyāyān mā prahmadah
TUI.11.1*

*Speak the Truth
Practice Dharma
Do not forget to Meditate¹*

¹ Original text: *Espiritualidad hindú. Sanātana dharma* (Barcelona: Kairós, 2005). Translated from Spanish into English by David Morris.

PROLOGUE

*Whatever you do, eat, offer in sacrifice,
give away or any hardship you go through,
make this offering to me.*

Whoever loves me shall not be lost.

BG IX.27/31

*The spirit blows wherever
(whenever and however) it wants.*

Jn 3:8

Much water has run through the Ganges since my initiate's immersion half a century ago. After the praxis, impelled by my biology and my *karma*, came the theory driven by my intellectual life enabling me to critically assimilate my experience.¹ But I also felt the need for a systematic study less burdened by my previous Christian language—the result of which being this book.²

A circumstantial halt in my path made me realize that, in spite of the vast quantity of texts written about Hinduism, a didactic and synthetic exposition could still be of use, just as my previous work had been in its time.

Is it worth dusting off these writings of decades ago when I have still so many apparently more important studies to be finished?

Having had to interrupt other studies for health reasons, I thought I could dedicate some of my time to uncovering an old descriptive manuscript I had on Hindū spirituality, which had in its time enabled me to acquire a vision of my ancestral religion as a whole, one that accompanied me intellectually in my personal quest into such religiosity. It seemed to me that unwrapping this manuscript after forty long years was going to be a relatively simple task, believing that along with it I would be of service to those readers who, in their thirst for spirituality, have become a little disillusioned with routine religiosity. I must confess that the time and effort spent has proved much more than I thought it would be. The actual reading through my own texts was not the easy task of proofreading, scrutinizing grammar, or bettering style, but turned out to be much more. I have had to think over every single line and bring back to life the experiences that led me to write it—thus, consequently, modifying the text.

Some of my friends have suggested that I was wasting my time at this late stage in life. Although time cannot be wasted, this “lost” time is dedicated to potential readers. I am also grateful that the year spent reinforcing this springboard also allows me to consolidate other boards from which to undertake the spiritual dive called for in our times, at a higher

¹ See my many publications from those times, among which are Panikkar (1960/III), Panikkar (1971/VII), and Panikkar (1994/X) (from an original in English, 1964).

² Originally published as a chapter of vol. 4 of *Historia de la Espiritualidad*, ed. L. Sala Balust and B. Jiménez Duque, coordinators (Barcelona: Flors, 1969), 433–542; also published as *Spiritualità indù* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1975).

level and in a more elegant fashion—since this is not an individual adventure but rather one belonging to humanity as a whole.

Although I believe I have overcome the temptation of *doing* good, I think this book will serve the legitimate interest in the West for other forms of spirituality. Because of this, I have sought to describe the fundamental traits of Hindū spirituality, without praise or vilification, in the most descriptive manner possible. And for this very same reason, I have extended the text somewhat, in addition to adding footnotes that help to broaden upon topics that are only briefly mentioned in the text. I trust that with this work I am making my contribution to combating the epidemic of superficiality that has flooded contemporary culture.

Hence, this book should be seen as an introduction into Hindū *dharma* for all types of readers and, at the same time, a compendium for those who wish to study such a vast problematic subject in depth. For too long a time, a certain vogue has made us think we can “help ourselves” to this spirituality with a minimum of effort.

When we say “Hindū” we are referring to a wide range of religions stemming from the Indian subcontinent that also flourish throughout most of Southern Asia. Let us not forget that Hinduism has no founder.

When we say *dharma*, we are referring to something that has no founder either, something that has no other boundaries than those of human beings.³

When we say “Hindū *dharma*” we are referring to something that has no prior fixed limits and therefore without precisely delimited doctrinal frontiers. Hindū *dharma* is encountered in the transcendental relationship, as philosophy would say, with a specific way of embodying human spirituality.

The Western spirit tends to observe the tree and only see the forest as an abstract concept. A large proportion of the Eastern spirit tends to enjoy the forest, ignoring individual trees. More than anything, “Hindū *dharma*” represents the human forest of spirituality in different specific ways of seeking to be a complete human being. For instance, we can interpret “Calvinist spirituality” through its differences, and that would be legitimate above all because that is how representatives of this spirituality see themselves. The total opposite happens with Hindū self-comprehension: Hindūs do not interpret themselves through that which makes them different, but rather through common human background, although perhaps with a certain color, which is considered secondary. If this were to have been understood, many tragic misunderstandings would surely have been avoided throughout history. We shall later enlarge upon *sanatana dharma*.

The image known as “Porphyry’s tree,” which is at the basis of Western self-comprehension—its most graphic example being the immense edifice of modern science—does not enable us to understand Hindū spirituality. It cannot be placed together with others in a porphyrian classification: given Quaker, Calvinist, Shiite, Baha’i, and secular spiritualities, all of them in juxtaposition with each other. Chemical elements can be classified, and concepts as well, as one element is not another one, and concepts should not be confused either. Yet, really

³ We have confused living words, which are symbols that have crystallized the experience of a certain given culture, with concepts, which are useful signs to distinguish homologous entities—and in general are quantifiable. I have heard rabbis who would rather use “tradition” than “religion,” in the sense of race; there are Catholics who use “religion” in the sense of “institution” (or even of club); when it comes to serious atheists (again another ambiguous word), to talk of God is an escape route and only a little less than an obscenity. Words stemming from a perhaps slightly exotic origin can sometimes be used because of not having suffered the erosion of use and abuse of a certain culture. Retrieving symbolic knowledge is an imperative of our times, without falling into the trap, on the other hand, of solipsistic individualism.

and truly, spirituality cannot be classified by this method of exclusion. The distinctive traits of each spirituality are its own traits; yet Hindū spirituality feels a little uncomfortable if it is classified via this procedure. It feels itself to be human rather than “Hindū,” although seen from the outside, characteristic traits can be detected. That which is characteristic does not necessarily have to be that which is essential—*contra* Porphyry.

This trait in Hindū spirituality does not transform it into something universal, as some people would like to think, but it does allow one, more clearly than in other cases, to discover aspects that have remained in the penumbra. Hence, this book can also help to plumb one's own identity. It will be for readers themselves to discover if that way of living life shows them something that can be applied to their own. Not only that, but it allows them to do so without being “converted” to Hinduism as if this were like joining another club. Although some notes and paragraphs can seem somewhat “academic,” due to the author's conscientiousness, this book could equally have been presented as a “treaty of spirituality” from a particular perspective; that of the Indian subcontinent.

Both in India and in other parts of the world, a certain conception of spirituality has been sometimes interpreted as an excuse, or at least a palliative, a reason to remain immune from political problems in society, leaving the world of dispute to the “worldly ones.” This is a real danger, but one extreme does not justify the other. Moreover, recovering the sacred dimension of secularity, which in other places I have named “sacred secularity”—not to be confused with “secularism”—is germane to the *kairós* of this millennium, just as much in the East as in the West.

What our times are in desperate need of, after centuries, or in some cases millennia, of divorce between this world and the other, between religion and politics, is precisely the union (I do not mean unity) between these two dimensions of humanity. Monisms, whether religious or political, do not solve the problems we may have these days (just as they never have done). A-duality or *Advaita* is the key means par excellence that Hindū spirituality has forged thematically. What the present world is crying out for in the voice of more than half of the world's population—although, more often than not, this is a voice we do not wish to hear—is not just a mere reform of institutions but rather a radical transformation of the actual meaning in life itself. This transformation cannot be violent, and this not only for ethical reasons, but also pragmatic ones that would be counterproductive.

This is the role of true spirituality. Revolutions do not last, and in the long run self-acclaimed conquerors have never won out in this world. The weak through their suffering and patience have always come out on top in the end. That is an empirical fact. Yet sometimes we understand lessons better in others' heads, in an indirect fashion, rather than through indoctrination, however pedagogical.

And so, it does not seem such a waste of time to have rejuvenated this manuscript, which I hope will help readers through the transformation that in other places I have termed *meta-noia*—inspired by that spiritual call two thousand years ago, which, in spite of being often unheeded or betrayed, is still one of man's few sources of inspiration.

Readers may miss more explicit references to modern India—a valid excuse for this absence being that, in spite of the sociological weight of modern times, Indian spirituality remains classical. The author hopes, above all, to still be able to publish a study on this that he has been writing for a quarter of a century.⁴

We should not identify “Hindūism,” the object of our analysis, with what is known as such by followers of the *Hindūtva*. Praising the teachings of the *Gītā* or expounding the

⁴ See Section 3, ch. 1, *Indra's Cunning: The Challenge of Modernity—The Case of India* whose title is sufficiently explicit.

Sanskrit tradition does not mean degrading the *Tirukkural* or Tamil tradition—although one must recognize the danger of one-sidedness.

We must state clearly, once and for all, that the adjective Hindū referring to the large family of religions does not embrace all spirituality on the subcontinent. For instance, a large proportion of popular spirituality has an earlier beginning to what is commonly known as “Hinduism.” The *adivasi* spirituality belonging to the first inhabitants of India, the resurgent dalit consciousness, to give another example, lies beyond the realms of this study. Although we have not exclusively limited ourselves to Sanskrit sources, they inspire the vast majority of this work. The author is very conscious of the one-sidedness involved here and apologizes for it, since for far too long a time, India and spiritual India have been identified with the culture vehicularized by Sanskrit and languages derived from it. The author feels great sympathy for the “de-Sanskritization” of Hinduism—as he also does for the de-Hellenization of Christianity, but one thing does not detract from the other.

Another general observation is the following. We are not presenting any kind of apology for Hinduism, and much less are we harboring apologetic intentions. Hinduism, as with all religions, has its blind spots and shadows. They have not been covered up, yet neither have we laid stress upon the tradition’s negative side. We consider that Hindū spirituality, apart from having great value in itself, can enrich and stimulate other forms of religiosity. Hence we have ventured to underline those aspects that Western readers can interpolate, without essentially veering away from our intent to being complete and impartial.

Neither must we forget what I have termed the golden rule of hermeneutics in another section of the book, that is, that the interpretation should equally be seen to be valid by those being interpreted—in other words, that the description should be recognized as valid by the people of the tradition being described. For instance, the description of a monist vision of reality should be recognized as being true for monists, a fact that does not detract from subsequent criticism.

Apart from this, this study could have another effect, in collateral fashion. For widely varying reasons (among which I mention the caricature that has come to be made of God in modern religious culture and technocratic ideology), contemporary civilization has secured religious tolerance by converting spirituality into a private matter, irrelevant in modern everyday social life. God has been converted into a superfluous hypothesis for the sphere that many would term “real life.” The alternative is not fanaticism or what is known as fundamentalism. But this book has no intention of directly addressing this problem; we only wish to describe a spirituality which, even if nowadays in crisis for analogous reasons, still represents an extremely vital force in Indian culture.

Indian *dharma*, which we could equally call Hindū spirituality, makes no claims to be just one single religion’s speciality, in spite of recent outbreaks of fundamentalism. It has always intended to be a universal spirituality (*sanatana dharma*), although with its own particular flavor. Hence, this manuscript may well be indirectly helpful to readers who are interested in something more than receiving information on a spirituality other than their own, and who are seeking to fathom this out in their own lives.

Although this book is not a comparative study of spiritualities, the author notes that both the language of his original monotheistic culture (or antimonotheistic culture in the West) move within a horizon of intelligibility very different to that which created traditional Hindū spirituality. Thus readers may find it difficult to avoid at least implicit comparison between some Western terms used here to express Hindū ideas and the same words in the habitual meaning in their own culture. For instance, the word “God” or even the word “Man” does not point to the same immediate reference in one culture as in the other. If we wish

to understand the meaning of vocabulary we have no other choice than to integrate it into the field of intelligibility of our culture, with the aim of stripping it of any resonance alien to the original culture.

The science of interculturality is still in its infancy. The author has made the effort of employing language that does not misconstrue its original intuition, yet at the same time is understandable to nonspecialist readers. Because of this, some comparisons with Christian tradition are occasionally inserted. On the other hand, neither Hindū nor Western tradition is monolithic; and if in some instances we have allowed ourselves to generalize, it has been to underline some contrast between the two and not solely to characterize one or the other of them.

The fact that forty years have elapsed since the writing of the first draft of this book has allowed me not only to reshape many phrases but also insert new ideas that, without altering the thread of its discourse, has turned this work into a new study.

I feel that I should make yet another confession. The author *suffers* from the vulgarization (in the derogatory sense) of contemporary religion and spiritual life—admitting, of course, that there are some praiseworthy exceptions. Spiritual roots in the West have been left to atrophy, and the same might be said of the East. Mutual fecundation is called for. Hence, the author has allowed inserts and digressions and footnotes that will help to encourage readers. It has been said that those who do not know anything about other religions know nothing of their own.

This is not the moment to criticize strict monotheism, nor the time to say that the “historic God” has failed, at least in the eyes of human beings—which are the ones we are blessed with.⁵ But it is the moment to show how Hindū spirituality goes about human life as if it were a form of liturgy in which Nature, Man, and Gods all cooperate in the maintenance of the universe—the profound *lokasamgraha* of the *Bhagavad-gītā*.

Three Western tourists with their pockets full of rupees, increased in value owing to the progressive devaluation of the currency, and with good intentions to spend the said rupees, enter a shop in Mumbai and, on seeing a little fellow behind the counter, spontaneously inquire after the proprietor of the establishment. They are not going to haggle with a mere shop assistant. “Where is the boss?” Almost without thinking, in a similarly spontaneous manner, the man, who actually is the proprietor, points his finger toward the heavens and answers, “*Bhagavan!* the Lord.” He did not consider for one moment that he himself could be in charge. To see God in all things and all things in God is much easier than it seems, if we do not separate religion from life or God from his creation—something demanding a new cosmology, a different anthropology, and a mystical theology.

We shall not explicitly go into all this in this book, but perhaps these pages will reveal something of this to readers if the author has succeeded in becoming like the Oracle of Delphi, not affirming, but rather suggesting or pointing out. To be an *auctor* is to make those who listen grow, and thus necessarily to be inspired. But true readers have to have been initiated. No one is born being able to read.

There is a happy medium between wanting to say everything, under any pretext, and getting straight to the point, assuming that reality may be divided into watertight compartments. In my naïveté I had thought that bringing this new edition up to date would be “plain sailing” so to speak, remodeling one or another idea and adding one or another marginal note; it has not been so, since I have been unable to write anything that has not been lived or relived. And so, I have had to delve into this most complex and paradoxical spirituality in full,

⁵ See Panikkar (1999/XXXVII), Sūtra VII and epilogue.

astounded as I was to see that even in those now far-off days I had sensed and experienced all the profundity of my parents' religious intuitions. Perhaps it will be said that I am overoptimistic, having left to one side the undeniable darker reaches of Hinduism. I do not believe myself to be turning a blind eye to them or falling into the same mistake as the converted by idealizing new discoveries. But one only experiences positive spirituality when all fanaticism has been eliminated. I also consider this book to be spiritual nourishment for any reader who does not shut their eyes when finding the path is uphill. One of the functions of going uphill is to make us stop in our way to take a deep breath and be aware that we are not alone.

So as not to overload the book too much, the translation of the full extent of many important texts has been left out, limiting myself to quoting their source.⁶

Tavertet
Pentecost 2003

⁶ It would be an affront and deformation to Hindū tradition if we were to limit ourselves to that which we set out to write in the rest of the book. Thus, the bibliography and footnotes at least attempt to fill in the gaps left by our exposition. Another of the functions of the abundant bibliographic quotes is to help us orient ourselves in our personal quest of fathoming out our lives. We are not lone pilgrims, and without falling into superficial eclecticism we are able to learn from the whole human experience.

PROLOGUE TO THE FIRST EDITION

To sum up fifty centuries of a hefty part of humanity's arduous quest to reach perfection is a practically impossible task, even if we were to increase the pages threefold. If we add a second difficulty, stemming from, on the one hand, the mutual heterogeneity and ignorance of Christian and Hindü spiritualities, and on the other hand, the misunderstanding, or we could say distortion (more dangerous when more unconscious and well meaning on both sides), one will understand that the enterprise, apart from being unrealizable in itself, turns out to be illusory. Or at least is so with regard to Western readers, whose habits, not simply mental, but moreover human, have evolved in another direction. Yet this intrinsic and extrinsic double risk makes the adventurous enterprise of seeking to clear the path more tempting (and urgent). This is perhaps still an impassable path, yet one that, with the aid of others, could become viable, whose transit could provide, on the one hand, what since the dawning of history the West has always sought in the East (in the apparent guise of natural spices and rich materials): wisdom and enlightenment.¹ On the other hand it could provide the East with what they have always so fervently desired: to be fertilized by a transcendent principle, crystallized in a holandric manner, which will not detract from the East's universality yet enhance its immense receptivity.

To make this task a little less lengthy, but on the other hand still more complex, our study leaves aside any direct comparative study between both spiritualities, an omission that the author hopes will prove to be worthwhile. For this, one requires an uncluttered, open mind and a discarding of inveterate prejudices and of preconceived, aprioristic ideas—which in the end always lead to faltering faith, which fears competition and seeks to defend itself by shutting itself up in its castle. This is a renunciation that in any case is indispensable, here too, to gain our souls. The comparative study of religions and even more so of spiritualities suffers a fundamental constitutional defect: for the very fact of wanting to compare, to distinguish, and because of distinguishing. When someone distinguishes they belong to one of the two parts, and cannot but separate. Comparison in this field is not so much odious as false.

There is, indeed, one kind of human righteousness that can only work by multiplying and dividing. For instance, if I study Benedictine spirituality from the standpoint of Carmelite spirituality, I will describe it by contrasting one with the other. The comparison is only possible through their differences; whatever is identical coincides. Thus, comparative study results in being problematic for the "compared" item. The only valid way to draw a parallel in these cases is not through their mutual comparison, but rather the relative comparison of a common foundation encountered in both spiritualities (in this case).² Benedictine and Carmelite spirituality can be studied in association with their shared Christian source, which both spiritualities wish to develop.³

¹ See Mt 2:2.24; Is 41:2; etc.

² *Śaṅkara*, in his commentary in the BS III.2.20, states that when two things are compared, their common ground must first be found. See also *ibid.*, II.3.40.

³ See Bouyer (1960), vol. 1, where in its general preface (p. 10) it is stated that there is only one, or better still, *the* Christian spirituality. See the reservations of Daniélou (1961), pp. 270–74, and answers by the present author in Bouyer (1961), pp. 411–15.

Unfortunately, the common basis between Christian spirituality and that of other religions is still somewhat virgin territory yet to be explored.

This is a weak point in otherwise excellent studies on the subject that have been undertaken in recent years. Fear of eclecticism should not make us fall into the unfounded (and more endemic) danger of exclusivity.

The conscious assimilation and theological elaboration of this common religious basis in humanity pertains to the *kairòs* of our times—where a certain form of Christianity is intent on being its culmination. To present Christianity as *another* religion is a sin against Catholicism. The aim of Christianity of presenting the truth involves its being capable of integrating all religious truths that have been found or that can be found outside its own field. Yet all of this lies beyond our scope at this moment, especially so since the same goes for the other side under consideration. The intent of any system of thought to present the truth involves its renunciation of being truth's only proprietor; its potential universality would be violated, as Thomas Aquinas pointed out: Truth is not possessed, Truth possesses us. Whatever else there may be is fanaticism.

Nevertheless, to enable getting through to the reader in an intelligible fashion we need to translate from one language to another and from one set of categories to others. This calls for a certain implicit synthesis and perhaps a certain latent comparison, constituting the humble merit and inevitable risk of this study—the merit being invisible, the risk all too patent.

Let us briefly talk about what seems to us to be the fundamental principle, not so much regarding direct comparison (which we seek to avoid) but rather the correct intellection (*intus-legere*) of another religion or another spirituality.

Analogically to how wrong or evil may be considered to be a privation (of something that should be there, but is not), in the same way error lacks ontological consistency, but rather is a deformation (of something which is and thus is true). Error is a truth that has been abused, and this danger of abuse is contained within any truth. Yet there is also the possibility that redemption is potentially harbored in any mistake.

For any comparison to be justified, a pattern of truth is required as a yardstick. Any comparison (as with any judgment) cannot be thought as just if it does not heed both sides equally. On the other hand, one must not be untrue to one's convictions, and being impartial does not mean being above and beyond the two conceptions or compared parties, but rather being within them both, understanding them from within and seeing them emerge as a bifurcation from a common source. Hence our effort focuses on offering an integral vision of one of the parties, in such a way that, making it intelligible to the other, gives leeway for a critical judgment to be made. Our description of Hinduism underlines its true foundation, without deforming it. In the last instant humans solely live by truth, and if Hinduism has nurtured a large part of humanity during millennia, it cannot be denied that its soul is true.

Rome, 1962

*

Following an initial *descriptive* section that seeks to present an overview of the history of Hindū spirituality, there is a second *positive* section in which some of the fundamental institutions in Hinduism are featured.⁴

For reasons of space and time we are compelled to forgo a more extensive exposition, and also a thorough theological elaboration of Hindū spirituality. Nonetheless, we are sure

⁴ Translations of texts, where not indicated otherwise, are mine, and many of them are found in Panikkar (1994/XXV) and in their Italian translation, Panikkar (2001/XXV).

that this present investigation will be sufficient to introduce readers into the core of such spirituality, avoiding an over-complex explanation that could be used as an excuse to not personally launch oneself into the field of spirituality, where “science inflates,” mere erudition kills, and only “the spirit vivifies.”

However, before getting down to the subject, first comes a terminological introduction, which intends to fix the meaning of the two words: “spirituality” and “Hindū.”

This is probably a more necessary clarification taking into account the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism following the misfortune of radical misunderstanding between East and West, almost since the West drew such lines—although the West’s knowledge of India dates back to pre-Christian times. What is known as “the East-West Schism,” sometimes known as “the Great Schism,” not only separated two parts of Christianity ten centuries ago, but also has restricted fruitful contact and sharing of mutual religious knowledge between Christian and non-Christian worlds beyond the Mediterranean. Perhaps the first phase of conscious and respectful ignorance was more fruitful and just, with its casual encounters and appreciations, than the second phase, when the West, striking out beyond Byzantium, went about conquering, colonizing, and at the same time converting, based upon the implied global condemnation of Hinduism as a false religion. Present-day history now presents us with a third phase of comprehension and encounter, which is leading to an evaluation not so much subjectively “objective” as objectively “subjective,” that is, from the point of view of “the other” for whom this religion represents truth and salvation.

Tavertet
Pentecost, 2006

PART 1
INTRODUCTION

THE NATURE OF HINDUISM

Characteristics

The query into the nature of any problem implicitly leads, not only to the hope for a solution, but also to an expectation of a particular answer. This is due to the fact that on asking about something we automatically categorize it for being actually something. When asked in a Christian fashion what Hinduism might be, one would assume the answer to be that it concerned a certain religion such as is, for instance, Islam. Now, if we ask ourselves this question with this implicit expectation, we will surely discover many elements that will more than satisfy us, but we would never discover what Hinduism really is.

Of course, the initial thought to have clear when asking what Hinduism is, lies in seeking its actual definition. Well, in fact, Hinduism is, by definition, something that does not have and cannot have a definition. It is no coincidence that Hinduism, on the contrary to humanity's other great religions, has no founder; neither does its main sacred scriptures have authors—because they are primordial words of God.¹ In fact, strictly speaking, Hinduism does not have a name. It was everyone else who, to be able to distinguish themselves from the Hindūs, gave it this name, which has stuck.

Another of Hinduism's characteristics that immediately springs to mind is its most varied and sometimes even contradictory multiplicity of paths, sects, and confessions (confessions are those that have devotees), not to mention its plurality with doctrinal schools. This is why Hinduism is usually said to be a range of religions rather than just one sole religion.²

That Which Hinduism Is Not

Before addressing the question of what Hinduism may be, we shall pave the way by following a very typical ontological reduction in Indian philosophy. When the Indian mentality searches for the correct predicate of a subject, it does not rest until it reaches its total identification; when, for instance, the nature of the personal subject, the *ātman*, is investigated, no predicate outside *brahman* satisfies this search. I am not, effectively, my body or my ideas or even my mind or my will, as all of these things are changeable and therefore stand for a constitutive relationship with not being, which makes them incapable of providing a satisfactory answer to a question that inquires into the nature of being. For the same reason, neither am I my contingent and variable ego.

In the same way, there is no predicate of the order of essence that can exhaustively come up with the required equation to arrive at an adequate answer to what Hinduism really is. Hinduism is not just one single doctrine (thus there may be umpteen Hindū doctrines),

¹ This intuition of the, very often, misunderstood notion of *apauruseyatva* (*sine auctore*), I allow myself to say, as the text has *auctoritas* in itself.

² "Hinduism is more of a league of religions than a single religion with a definite creed." Sharma (1939), p. 10; Sundaram (1934), p. 13; and many others say the same thing.

or single idea (hence it has no need of logical coherence), or one organization or one ritual. Hinduism has no limits. It has no definition. If anything is proved to be true, Hinduism will immediately accept it as its own. The great fear in Hinduism is that (partial) "truths" will destroy the (total) "Truth."

We emphasize this, as it is a crucial point, because if we are to ask the wrong question, any answer to this question will be equally wrong. One cannot ask what Hinduism is without first asking, as a Hindū, what I am myself. On the contrary, it would be a baffling question. The question does not touch my I. Hence the recurring advice of so many gurus that invite us to ask ourselves who we are, or rather in a more specific fashion, "who (am) I?"—*ko'ham?* Any objectivization of a vital question takes the life from it; it kills it—it is converted into an abstract, conceptual answer.

In a nutshell: Hinduism is not an essence; its nature cannot be searched for with one's reason. Hinduism demands a conversion of mere existence to the phatic order to be apprehended.³

This does not prevent us from detecting epistemological presuppositions in the vital question that legitimates our question on the nature of Hinduism. Adopting this cautiousness, we shall proceed in our attempt to frame an intelligible answer.

That Which Hinduism Is

Hinduism belongs to the order of pure unvarnished facticity, and if we wish to give an answer to what it is, we must find an abstraction, underlying the most varied of religious confessions and that can, as a sort of raw material, be informed upon by the most distinct forms. It does not have *one* objective content, but rather it is a continent, capable of containing the most divergent essential interpretations.

Hinduism wants to be *the* truth, yet it does not claim to endow this truth with any essential content. Hinduism's greatest intuition is that any intellectually founded truth calls for some kind of limitation and along with it the exclusion of other truths. Out of respect for *the* Truth, all are admitted in their logical order. Thus, where logical thinking sees a contradiction Hindū thinking posits more or less harmonic or even complementary diversity.

We are here getting down to the grain of many misunderstandings, so we shall continue with it. One cannot understand the self-comprehension of Hinduism in the same way as a hetero-comprehension (from without). Western genius interprets the essence of something as the equivalent of its specific difference. Hence its excellence in classification. Prevailing Eastern genius sees the essence to be a manifestation of what is generic, just as the root that gives rise to all—according to the explanation of a famous passage in the Upaniṣad that seeks what there is in common in all things to be able to find their ultimate constituent, their *animan*, their root (the most subtle, the atom).⁴ If Hinduism were to give itself a name it would be known as: *sanātana dharma*, meaning, perennial order, order which remains underlying all ordination.⁵ *Dharma*, this notion that

³ For general bibliographic material on Hinduism, one can consult Deleury (1978); Esnoul (1979); Piano (1996a); Piantelli (1996a; 1996b) Schumacher & Woerner (1993); Walker (1995), and others named later on. See note 43, this chapter.

⁴ See *CU* VI.8ff. Fundamental text that contains the most famous statements (*mahāvākya*) in Indian wisdom: *Tat tvam asi*, "You are that." See Panikkar (2001/XXV), pp. 1024–41.

⁵ "Sanātana dharma means eternal religion" (Mahadevan, 1956), p. 12. "Religion based on the Veda, Sanātana dharma or Vaidika dharma . . ." (Bhagavan Das, 1940), p. 13. See Piano (1996b), whose chosen title is the presentation of one of the best actual studies on Hinduism in general.

has been translated in so many different ways (religion, ordination, duty, righteousness, morality, habit, law, rules, harmony, virtue, merit, justice, conduct, doctrine, and so on), would describe the true nature of Hinduism.⁶ The *dharma* concept is perhaps the most fundamental in all Hinduism.⁷ Hinduism simply is *dharma*. The neo-Hindū expression “Hindū *dharma*” is a pleonasm that only indicates Western influence. There is no *dharma* that cannot be known as Hindū. We must lay stress upon this point as its oversight has been one of the causes for so much misunderstanding in the past and present encounters of Hinduism with all other religions.

Perhaps the etymology of the word would be more enlightening than any other consideration. Taken from the root word *dhṛ*, which means take or bear, according to *Mahābhārata*’s own description, *dharma* means, “that which maintains, that which sustains people.”⁸ *Dharma* is simply the cosmic order of all reality: *ṛtena ṛtam dharunam dharayantha*, cosmic order (*ṛta*) has *dharma* for a support.⁹

Order (*ordo*) seems to be an approximate translation, understanding it in the medieval scholastic ontological meaning equivalent to harmony, since these days it has other connotations.¹⁰

There is a true ontological order in the world, not just as an extrinsic ordination of the nature of things, but rather as their most basic ontological structure.¹¹ Treating it as a primordial order it is equivalent to harmony, since we have no other criteria to judge it—unless we believe that the human mind can tell us “what it should be” independently from what it *is*. This order, which to give it more consistence and life, sometimes appears personified,¹² in fact represents the hierarchical ontological structure of being.¹³ Whoever harms this order does harm to themselves and sins, those who keep to it reach the end and plenitude of their lives. The awareness of this order leads to ultimate wisdom and salvation. This order regulates life in the cosmos, along with the life of the individual and society. Morality and every positive value acquire their value and reality as soon as they become expressions of this order, which is not something like an external law imposed upon events, but rather is the actual nature of things seen from their dynamic and hierarchical aspect.¹⁴

“If *dharma* is harmed it destroys; so, if it is maintained it protects.”¹⁵ In fact, it is the principle of stability and true order that upholds all things.¹⁶

⁶ See Badrinath (1993; 2000).

⁷ On the subject of *dharma* See Altekar (1952); Badrinath (1993); Hacker (1958; 1965); Gandhi (Mahātmā) (1950); Gonda (1958; 1960–63); Kane (1958); Nivedita (1952); Rangaswami Aiyangar (1941).

⁸ Santpar XII.109.14 and Karnpar VIII.LXIX.59.

⁹ See *RV* V.15.2. See Manickam (1977), p. 197, for a brief commentary on this cryptic text that Geldner (1951) translates in a rather different fashion.

¹⁰ See Meyer (1961), who founded all Thomistic philosophy on the idea of order.

¹¹ This ontological conception of *dharma* is already found in the Veda. See *AV* 1.2, where the *dharman* (Vedic form of *dharma*) make up the ultimate structure of things, just as they have been modeled by Varuṇa. On the *dharma-ṛta* relationship, it is well worth seeing a monographic study. See Miller (1985).

¹² See *Manu* VIII.14–16.

¹³ It is important to observe that *RV* X.16.3, which usually is considered as being the Vedic history foregoing the theory of “*karman*” understood as transmigration, uses the word “*dharman*,” meaning inherent and constituting quality of being instead of the searched for “*karman*” in this case. (See also Chatterjee [2005], p. 80).

¹⁴ See the illuminating comparison between the *dharma* of *Manu* and the Torah in Manickam (1877). See also *The Dharma of Jesus*, which gathers the theological articles of the late Soares-Prabhu (2003).

¹⁵ *Manu* VIII.15. Modern versions translate it as, “when justice is violated it destroy, when it is upheld it protects (us).”

¹⁶ “The principle of universal stability” coined by Gonda (1960–63), p. 1:289.

Hence *dharma* comes into close relationship with *karman* very early on, which gives rise to the variety of meanings it has later on.¹⁷ The *Mahābhārata* itself recognizes that there are four ritualistic and four moral paths of *dharma*. The first four are sacrifice, prayer, giftedness, and asceticism, and the second four are truth, patience, self-control, and indifference to worldly gain.

One of the capital notions in Hinduism is *svadharma*, in other words, one's own personal *dharma*, something along the lines of the ontical place of every being in the scale of beings.¹⁸ The individual's compulsion consists in following their own *dharma*, that is to say, the regulating law (which becomes duty) of the unfolding in their existence. Everyone has their own *dharma*, that is, their own duty for being that that must grow to become an integral part of the total Body of the universe. The *Gītā* goes as far as stating that "it is better to comply with your own *dharma* (*svadharma*) even though it is done defectively than 'comply' with someone else's perfectly."¹⁹ This is one of the reasons for Hinduism's resistance to the "conversion" seen as a "change" in religion. Thus, here we have another sad example of the misunderstanding we mentioned beforehand. One does not change religion as one changes profession—much less as one changes one's political party. The bills and acts against the "conversions" laid down by the government of the Republic of India are well known. Religion is interpreted as a *purely* sociological issue, thus paying a tribute to modernity on both sides.

The understanding and realization of *dharma* is the religion. Hence, although it may have a unique common base, religion may be considered as a personal or collective concretion of *dharma*. Hence the minutia of religious rules that most of all the other religions have in common. The sanction here could not be other than intrinsic. This is why, on the restoring of order, prescribed action must also be taken to undo the wrong committed as far as possible. Nevertheless, sometimes, when there is a total breakdown there is no possible reparation. "Neither penitence nor sacrifice is of any aid."²⁰

The ontological character of *dharma* explains Hinduism's common belief in what is known as reincarnation.²¹ *Dharma* is the only thing that remains of human beings when departing from this earth.²² To simplify things, we could say that *karma* is the crystallization of *dharma*. The world would be chaotic if there were no possibility to repair *dharma* damaged by the bad actions of man or of natural disasters. The order must go on; someone has to connect with those who have ceased to exist on this earth to be able to carry the half-burned torch and continue the line of existence. There must be a continuity: the *samsara* or cosmic cycle of existence.²³ Is not the child the continuation of his or her parents' flesh? Let us just stress only

¹⁷ See Larson (1972).

¹⁸ See *Mait* IV.3.

¹⁹ *BG* III.35; XVIII.47; cf. II.33; etc.

²⁰ *VasDhSas*, VI.1. Cf. Mt 12:32; Lk 12:10 (sin against the Holy Ghost?).

²¹ See *Manu* XII.1ff.

²² See IV.238–43, among other texts.

²³ About this important point, which transcends our theme, one can advantageously consult: Radhakrishnan (1960), pp. 183–207, in its introduction to its translation and study (a closed defense); and Eliade (2000), who does not seek the ex professo of the subject, but presents important elements of judgment to be able to understand the problem. It contains an abundant bibliography. *Eranos Jahrbuch* (7/1939) is entirely dedicated to the subject (especially Zimmer's contribution, "Tod und Wiedergeburt im indischen Licht"). Coomaraswamy's interpretation, based on his translation of a text by Śaṅkara, "The lord is the only transmigrant" (*nesvarad anyah samsari* BSB, 1.5) is well worth taking into account; it distinguishes between "reincarnation" and "transmigration." It is not our ego which is saved but the atman, which is freed from transmigration (Coomaraswamy [1944], pp. 19–43).

one idea, not to avoid such a burning issue—without emphasizing the fact that the notion is gaining credibility due to the impoverished caricature to which we have reduced heaven and hell. Here we encounter the danger of conceptual comparisons when they become divorced from the different cosmologies where the concepts had originated. Without a precise idea of *karman*, any kind of transposition of reincarnation into an individualist ambit would lead us to misunderstandings. The cosmological idea known as “transmigration” should not endanger dignity, and therefore the unity either, of any beings that cannot reduce themselves to being mere impersonal links in a cosmic chain, a simple means to an end.²⁴

It is not our purpose here to talk about Buddhist *dharma*, although it does illustrate the Hindū idea of *dharma* through comparison. Whereas Hindū *dharma* is substantially ontological in nature, Buddhism conserves its total “reality,” in other words, its dynamics and efficiency, yet without considering it as something substantial. Nonetheless, in either case, *dharma* (*dhamma* in Pali) comes before our personal constitution and of course our intellectual knowledge.²⁵

In fact, Hinduism is not a religion in the common (and vulgar) sense of the word, it is simply *dharma*. Religion, above all in the modern West, has become a sociological fact, more or less institutionalized and identified with a certain ideology. Here we are presented by an example of the mutual cultural, and hence religious, fertilization between East and West. *Dharma* presents itself as being actual reality in its existential con-texture and its hierarchal dynamics, something like a mathematical point that is not defined only by its static situation but also requires its derivative to be integrated into the general line of being. *Dharma* is there, whether recognized or not. There can be adharmic actions, but an adharmic human has no meaning, for the same reason as there may be a moral excommunication yet there cannot be an ontological one; that would be the equivalent of the annihilation of the subject capable of these actions. Thus, *dharma* is capable of finding many ways by which it may be realized—including scorning God and religious myths. Every one of us possesses their own *svadharma*. This reminds us of a hadith of the Prophet that says, “There are as many paths toward me as hearts of my followers.” Religion is the concretion of the *svadharma* of any one person or group.

Perhaps the prevailing concept of religion in the West is no more than a wide-range species of a certain product.²⁶ It does not have to be said that the notion of modern actuality is no more than a caricature and reductionism of that which is traditionally understood by this word and its homomorphic equivalents. Religion is not primordially an institution nor is it one sole doctrine. For instance, orthopraxis is just as important as orthodoxy. Religion does not mean “religious” sect, but rather an anthropological dimension—one that perhaps could be known as religiosity.

This broad notion of *dharma* explains the odd character of Hindū tolerance. Hinduism is doctrinally tolerant, yet it is dharmically intolerant, or, in other words, it is essentially tolerant; it tolerates any interpretation that anyone can give to their own *dharma*. It allows the most diverse religious doctrines, but it is existentially intolerant; it cannot allow that the fundamental basis upon which the actual possibility of tolerance rests is denied, that is to

²⁴ This is an extremely complex subject with a wide range of bibliography. It is definitely worth mentioning Head & Cranston (1977); Parrinder (1993); Stanley (1989); Vallés (1998); see also Concilium (October 1993).

²⁵ On the subject of Buddhist *dharma*, see Coomaraswamy (1994); Glasenapp (1938), pp. 283–420; Glasenapp (1939), pp. 242–66; Silburn (1988); Stcherbatsky (1994).

²⁶ See in Heiler (1979) a good summary of different concepts and words that in the West are considered as “religion.”

say, the existence of an indestructible ontological order that paves the way for the maximum number of doctrinal pirouettes, without its center of gravity being moved.²⁷

Thus there are a series of characteristics in Hinduism that are not understood because of the unawareness of their existential character.²⁸ It is true that our intellect can be aware of *dharma*, but first Hinduism is an orthopraxis, which is an existentially and ontically dharmic action, rather than an orthodoxy, than a strict doctrine; it is a liturgy, a *sacra salvica*, rather than a correct inter-lesson of reality or salvation.²⁹ Actual Hindū faith insists upon the act of faith (without any content or determined object) much more than the reason for the act. That which is important is not the "idea," the content, the formulation of belief, but rather the act of believing.³⁰ At bottom any act of faith is objectivized; the act of faith becomes an object of "knowledge" (even if it is not through faith) instead of being pure faith, which is always the consciousness of ourselves being open to Mystery, just as much as if in relationship with any of our intentionality, whether it is willful or cognizant. We should not confuse faith (as a constituent part of man) with belief (as an intellectual content of faith), and neither of them with the act of faith (as the free acceptance of faith through a belief).³¹ Faith is an act of knowledge and free will, yet it is far more than this, and, before anything, it is an act of our total, naked being that hurls us toward the transcendental drawn by a mysterious attraction and call of this transcendence in the immanency of our hearts.³²

Hinduism and Christianity

Analogously to how the concepts of *brahman* and God are not the same or different, in terms of homomorphic equivalents,³³ contemplated from two almost opposite and after all completely different viewpoints,³⁴ Hinduism and Christianity present a very special polarity pregnant with consequences.³⁵

Hinduism sees itself as being the Religion of Truth. Christianity believes itself to be the Truth of Religion. The first takes Christianity with a universality that, in order to maintain its purity, it does not allow itself descent into any level of created order, and much less conceptual order. The second also believes itself to be Catholic with an ecumenism that, believing itself to be revealed, means conjugating the most absolute universality with the most absolute concretion: in the

²⁷ On the subject of Hindū tolerance, see Benz (1934); Hacker (1957); Hauer (1961); Huart (1956); Mensching (1952; 1955); K. M. Panikkar (1955); Quegner (1956); Staal (1959). On the subject of actual tolerance, see Panikkar (1970/13; 2000/XXVII), pp. 187–230.

²⁸ "Nowadays, in fact, any Indian who wants to be Hindū is Hindū." Gonda (1960–63), p. 1:347.

²⁹ "Therefore, Hinduism is that which Hindūs do. . . . Hence the Indian conception that religion is *dharma*."

³⁰ "Hinduism as a religion is more a praxis rather than a belief." Gonda (1960–63), p. 1:347.

³¹ See the now classical Aubert (1958) and Panikkar (1970/13; 2000/XXVII), pp. 187–230.

³² This is another point in which the encounter between religions can offer extraordinary fruitfulness for the theology of faith. See, from the point of view of Hinduism, Murty (1961).

³³ By "homomorphic equivalents" we understand a three-graded analogy, that is to say, that the function that exercises a notion in a determined system (for instance, being the last point of reference), is equivalent to that which the other notion exercises in the other system.

³⁴ See Panikkar (1961–63), pp. 182–88.

³⁵ "One cannot really be a 'Catholic' with a large 'C' without being a 'catholic' with a small 'c.' The quintessence of Hinduism would seem to lie in its being 'catholic' with a small 'c,' while clinging to an extremely ancient and primordial tradition, which a Catholic with a large C should be expected to understand deeply and restore to fullness of meaning" (Mascarenhas 1951).

theandrical mystery of Christ, God and man in indestructible and inseparable unity even while not confused or mixed.³⁶ If Christianity were to be presented as a concrete answer to Hinduism's thirst for universality and Hinduism lived as the universal content of religiosity, then the encounter between both would be realized on a truly common plane for them both and mutual fertilization would be possible, although this nuptials would be the death of the parents, who on the other hand would live on, resurrected in the offspring born to the light of the world.³⁷

³⁶ See Panikkar (1994/X).

³⁷ The bibliography on the relationship between Hinduism and Catholicism is very extensive, above all in recent years. There is even an association that publishes a bulletin: *Hindū-Christian Studies*, published by the University of Notre Dame (USA) and the Institute of Philosophy and Culture (Chennai, India), from where twenty-seven volumes have already been released.

SPIRITUALITY

Our intention here is not to conduct an inquiry into what spirituality may be. We shall confine ourselves to introducing a couple of relevant observations on the subject.¹

If by the word “spirituality” we understand the specific path that professes to lead humanity to its ultimate end, it will be seen that the actual field of spirituality should be in fact religion in action, rather than its theoretical development. The important consequence here for our subject lies in a certain independence from dogma. All spirituality implies dogma, but the inverse presents us with an odd plurality—that is to say, one dogma may serve as a basis for more than one spirituality, or, in turn, different dogmas can result in being contained in the same spirituality. Benedictine and Franciscan spirituality would be examples in the first case, Buddhist and Christian monastic spirituality in the second.

Without going any further into this discussion of the subject, this relative inter-independence exonerates us, in the first place, from giving an adequate description of Hinduism as a doctrine, which would lead us on too far, and in the second place, it prohibits us from coming to hasty conclusions in both negative and positive senses regarding the value of Hinduism as a religion.

One should also bear in mind that our study does not mean to be a history of Hindū spirituality, which is still just beginning—as far as history goes.

For our purpose we understand that if the dogmatic theology is the intellectual translation of orthodoxy, then by spirituality we could understand the intellectual translation of *orthopraxis*—that is, a set of practices, systems, methods, and so on, that do not show us what the truth may be, but rather how to capture the requirements of religion to aid us reaching our end. It is from this angle that we shall seek to study some of the aspects in Hindū spirituality.²

¹ “Spiritualité” is a word introduced and made popular in France since the beginning of the last century. See the seventeen extensive volumes of the DS (1920–95). The RGG does not contain any mention of “spirituality.” And the *ERE* only two and a half pages (Fyffe 1971). The more modern Eliade (1987) only contains the items “spiritual discipline” and “spiritual guide,” and in the preface “spirituality” refers to “Christian spirituality.” In general, most works are limited to Christian spirituality, as for instance Bouyer (1960); Borriello (2002); Demeige (1979); Matanic (1990); Paurat (1944); Sudbrack (1982–86). The DS (1920–95) dedicate thirty-one columns to spirituality in India, beneath the title of “Inde”; Conio (2000) dedicates sixteen columns to the term “Hindūism” in Fiore (2000); Kämpchen (1988) contains two and a half columns on “Indische Spiritualität” in Schütz (1988). Papali (1987) in the Spanish edition of Ancilli (1990) dedicates thirteen volumes to “Hinduismo.” A special mention should be given to Jiménez Duque/Sala (1969), who devotes the fourth of four volumes (from p. 725) to “Espiritualidades no christianas” [including “el ateísmo”].

² For a bibliography that deals directly with Hindū spirituality, apart from the works already purposely mentioned in other footnotes, see Akhilananda (1972); Chatterjee (1960); Esnoul (1972); Gathier (1960); Herbert (1972); Hertsens (1968); Johanns (1952); Klostermaier (1989); Lacombe (1956); Mahadevan (1958); Nikhilananda (1968); Pereira (1991); Quegner (1958).

We have asked ourselves why we speak of "spirituality" and not "religion." We have already touched upon the essence of this topic, yet perhaps it would be convenient to mention that which is existential about it. All human words become eroded through their use, but this happens much more quickly in the case of abuse. A large part of the modern world now does not consider itself as being "religious" as a result of the connotations of dogmatism and institutionalization that this word has acquired over the years, above all in the West. Many contemporary people do not declare themselves to be "religious," yet they do show interest and sympathy toward a certain spirituality within which they feel freer. If the latter word were understood as being the counterposition to that which is "material," the remedy would be worse than the illness, and if it were understood as the contrary of that which is "religious" in its profound meaning we would not progress very much either. Perhaps it could be considered as the apposition to "religion," that is to say, as a complement and supplement to a certain belittling of this last word.

For "religiosity" I do not understand either "religionism" (a sociological concept of belonging) nor "religiology" (doctrinal), but rather that attitude in man that is conscious of its "religation" to all reality, both divine, cosmic, and human, and which crystallizes into forms depending on the culture in which it is lived.

Taking into account all that has been said, and respecting the etymology, spirituality could be understood as that expression of human life which, overcoming dualist anthropology (body/soul), allows itself to be permeated, or better said, be enlivened by the Spirit as symbolic of a third dimension in which man is conscious of living.

Therefore, spirituality endows us with a clearer vision of ourselves and all things. Far too often, religion has been presented as an additive to human life, as a more or less essential bonus. Spirituality seeks to be a movement of incarnation of the religious vision in daily life. As such, for instance, a tree is a vegetable form that is governed by purely physical and biological laws of the realm of material nature from the modern way of thinking. A spiritual vision of a tree is not limited to its scientific conception, but rather something more than just vegetative life is seen. So, the tree of life and of knowledge of good and bad are not seen as mere more or less poetic metaphors, which distract us from the "real" nature of the tree, but rather something which belongs to its actual reality (that apart from being fed by its sap is brought to life by the Spirit) without having to interpret this phrase magically or dualistically. Perhaps a collateral effect of "Hindū spirituality" would be that of helping Western readers to regain a more complete (holistic) vision of reality.

What we understand by Hindū spirituality, then, is its surrounding myth, which in a certain manner allows us to uncover a world in which those people move who in one way or another see themselves reflected within that spectrum of religions that we have agreed to call Hinduism.

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At this point it is imperative that we say something about the autonomous spiritualities in India prior to Hinduism. Sympathy as a hermeneutic device to not misunderstand Hinduism (just as any other interpretation) does not mean ignoring its negative aspects (just as with all religions), but neither should it overlook those other spiritualities that for a time have been mixed up with Hinduism and that, especially these days, claim their own identity and rebel against their assimilation within Hinduism. This is a very touchy subject at the present political juncture in present-day India. We have described Hinduism as a wide range of religions, but not so wide-ranged as to include those that these days refuse to identify themselves with any of the range. We are referring to *adivasi* spirituality and to the present-

day consciousness of the *dalit*.³ These spiritualities represent a vast wealth and a problem in the actual Indian subcontinent. Religious frontiers cannot be traced with straight lines determined a priori, and above all in popular religiosity there are elements that rebel against being included in the "bunch" but in truth actually form part of it. Here we must also mention an emerging movement, even among intellectuals, that is against the "Sanskritization" of Hinduism. Not all Hinduism can be reduced to the tradition vehicularized by the Sanskrit language. Neither can present-day Christianity be reduced to its Jewish/Hellenic roots. We shall leave the subject to one side and just concentrate on that which could be known as the great Hindū tradition—without underestimating or scorning in any way the minor schools. On the contrary, I would personally say, but this is not the actual theme of the book.

Because of all this we have opted in the end for recovering the original meaning of *dharma*. Spirituality is an accepted word in the West these days for this indicated meaning, but there is no word within Indian tradition that translates it adequately. The native word for it is *dharma*, and we shall generally use it in its context—although interchangeably with "spirituality."⁴

When reflecting upon the path which leads people to their ultimate goal, and how this path is understood and experienced within the *dharma* of Hinduism, our field of study embraces the whole of reality. In practice, to narrow down the scope of our reflection we have concentrated on precisely the forms and characteristics of the path, ignoring the detailed analysis of the two poles, man and that ultimate reality that in some cultures is known as God, even though this book talks about nothing else. This is a deliberate omission, since, it being a work on spirituality, both its anthropology and theology are implicit, avoiding as such falling into the trap of giving a specialized treatise on man and another one on God, each independent of the other.

There is no need to say that our essay is totally imperfect at all levels, in all meanings of the word: it is deficient owing to our own limitations, incomplete and insufficient due to the vastness of the subject. And nonetheless, we trust that it may be of aid to readers on their own personal spiritual quest.

³ See Dangle (1992) as a sample of tragedies concerning millions of Indians.

⁴ See Panikkar (1994/44).

PART 2
THE HISTORY

The history of spirituality coincides with the actual history of humanity. At bottom, it is the truest and most effective dimension in human history, since the real task of people is not warfare, or building nations or cultures, but fulfilling themselves and gaining salvation, along with that other part of the cosmos, with which it is constitutively linked. Instead of the word "salvation," which has too many Greek-Christian connotations, we could use *realization*. People are half-made beings, and spirituality show the ways and means to total realization—allowing each different doctrine to specify what this realization may actually be. Other traditions within Hinduism itself prefer to speak of "liberation." They are all homomorphic equivalents.

Hence, the history of Hindū spirituality may be said to be the history of a large proportion of the people of India from the point of view of what they have done and what they have obtained in their yearning to reach their goal that (paradoxically), although being beyond the concept of history, is probably the most important historical factor. If empires have battled for just a handful of land and entire cultures have succumbed, in the end, humanity as a whole has moved for just a little more heaven, and the thirst for the "other world" has in the final analysis always impelled humanity to journey on through this world, not only in search of heaven, but yet to reach the spot where heaven and earth seem to join on the historical horizon, always future, always so far away, yet at the same time, present and within sight. Because of this, this spiritual factor has not always been an angelically pure factor in the history of humanity. The very fact that religion should be the most important historical factor makes one take it for granted that it would also be the most dangerous. A chemically pure (and puritan) religion would neither be human, nor religion for that matter.

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In an attempt to coincide with Western history, the history of India has been split according to the triple classification of ancient (that would be from its origins up until the first millennium after Christ), medieval (up until the middle of the eighteenth century) and modern (coming to its end with independence), after which we have to do with the contemporary age. Without totally rejecting this scheme we shall pursue one that comes closer to the classical Indian view and that adheres more closely to historic reality.

To cover the history of spirituality, the following division would seem to present us with a sufficiently complete panorama. Needless to say that divisions are always somewhat artificial, and perhaps a little more so in this case, owing to the fact that the criteria for division has to be a compromise between the dogmatic-theoretical point of view, the chronological perspective, and the cultural development, not always synchronized between the North and South, or from the standpoint of some of the religions, for instance.

The first great split has to do with the religious view that considers *Revelation* as the authoritative source of Hinduism, *Tradition* as the living example of the former in the different fields of human life along with their diverse literary genres, and the *Commentaries* as the human elaboration of the first two. We can situate ourselves within this division.¹

- I. The *Prevedic* period, which one would take as approximately dating from 3000 to 2000 BC.
 1. Prehistory
 2. The Indus Civilization

¹ It is not easy to find unanimity or sufficient agreement among modern authors. It is well worth consulting Sharma (1956).

3. The Dravidic culture
4. Popular spirituality
- II. Revelation (*śruti*).
 5. Vedic spirituality, evolving from approximately 2000 to 1000 BC.
 6. The age of the Upaniṣad, from 1000 to 600 BC.
- III. Tradition (*Smṛti*).
 7. The period of the *Vedāṅga* and *Kalpa-sūtra*, from 600 to 300 BC. An age of reaction and division (the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism). It could also be known as the *Dharma-śāstra*.
 8. The epic period of the *itihāsa*s (legends), which flourished from 300 BC to AD 300.
 9. The age of myths or the primitive *Purāṇas*, which would perhaps have extended from 600 BC to AD 300.
- IV. Commentaries (*bhāṣya*).
 10. The period of philosophic systems—*Darśana*. From AD 300 to 700.
 11. The period of great religions—*Āgama*, which, extending from AD 700 to 1400 in its creative and expansive period, would have constituted the period of the later *Purāṇas*.
 12. Popular spirituality, which could be characterized by the predominance of *bhakti*, generally speaking from 1400 to 1750.
 13. The modern reforms of 1750 to 1950, characterized by a certain renaissance after the Islamic age and subsequently the entire movement that achieved India's independence.
 14. The contemporary age, which corresponds to the half-century of India as a state.

Needless to say, the following pages do not aim at being more than a (dense) summary of an introduction to the history of spiritual movements within Hinduism, whose exposition can be found in numerous studies on the subject and whose critical development would be the great work of the third generation of scholars.²

² The incredible philological activity to the first stage (or first generation) in Indiology we could approximately bring to a close with the outbreak out of World War I (this stage included such great scholars as Max Müller [1823–1900], Maurice Bloomfield [1855–1928], Karl Geldner [1852–1929], Hermann Oldenburg [1854–1920], etc.). This work was continued by what we have called the second generation, which constitute the current masters, and out of respect we shall only mention those who have already finished their work, such as Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), Jean Przyluski (1875–1944), Louis Renou (1896–1996), Oliver Lacombe (1904–2001), and others whose great achievement is to have laid down a basis for an adequate internal comprehension of Hinduism. Along with their philological work, they have been profoundly active in hermeneutics. We are suggesting that the generation that began to emerge after the second European War had before them the by no means lesser task of presenting dialogue and encounter (somewhat more complex than mere comparison) between the different cultures and religions.

THE PRE-VEDIC PERIOD

(3000–2000 BC)

The theory that Hinduism stems from a purely Aryan background has long been superseded—in spite of some political forces that we mention later. Long before the Aryan invasion there was not only a substantial population along with their religions in India, but both in the North and South, these possessed an eminent level of culture as well as a religion that was already considerably developed. This would, after the meeting of the peoples, be transformed into Hinduism, except for those autonomous religions among the *adivasi*, the subcontinent's population (or populations) that remained aloof from the changing fortunes and vicissitudes of the official history. At bottom this is nothing exceptional since no religion arises out of nowhere.¹ For instance, what is known as Christianity would be poorly understood without regard for its pre-Christian elements. Recently, for political rather than historical reasons, support for an Indian pan-Aryanism, dating back to age-old times, has been advocated. We shall not enter into this controversy.

Prehistory

Abundant remains of prehistoric civilizations have been found throughout the Indian subcontinent, along with evidence of megalithic and neolithic cultures.² Jars and urns of all kinds have been unearthed, especially funerary urns, and graves have been found.³ It was thought at one time that India was the first place to develop the working of iron, although these days this statement cannot be confirmed.

Nothing certain can be said about the spirituality of these prehistoric cultures. Any kind of interpretation one could wish to make is subject to other factors, over and above the simple observation of data. So often writers have taken the description of the spirituality of prehistoric times too lightly. Although conscious of the lack of "historical" foundations for our pronouncements on the subject, we would like to briefly take this prehistoric spirituality into consideration, employing a certain amount of anthropology along with the permitted extrapolation from the subsequent development of *dharma* in Hinduism as a base.

Prehistoric man has always been seen as a species of wild animal yet to be humanized, and consequently, his religion has been treated as a kind of survival instinct, projected toward an unearthly future and his spirituality as a series of instinctive reactions, conditioned by the environment and the most diverse circumstances. This is all too evidently associated with the myth of the "primitive" and the "savage," which up until recently has

¹ For an exposition prior to this debate, see a good summary by Halbfass (1990). For firsthand historical documentation see André & Filliozat (1986).

² See N. K. Bose (1958, vol. 1).

³ See Renou & Filliozat (1947), pp. 1:193ff.

prevailed in the field of ethnological studies.⁴ Without entering into a deeper inquiry we would note the following.⁵

"Civilized" human beings in modern Western culture have become accustomed to taking their volitive and intellectual faculties as their substance of being, to the point of identifying their very being with their consciousness, even though they might be forced to admit the existence of a subconscious level (and also an unconscious level) underlying their conscious being. Everything else is not considered as being "human." The scholastic distinction between "human" acts that bring with them moral responsibility and deeds done "by humans," which simply have Man as the material undertaker of the deed, a fruitful distinction in the moral order, has been extrapolated to the point of denying the term "human" to that which does not fall within the range of the first acts interpreted in the light of individual and clearly differentiated consciousness—a state of affairs that except in the case of the present stage of Western culture, is hardly to be found in the history of humanity. If human life were restricted to what the contemporary West these days sees as being "human," the greater part of humanity would not be human. Neither the so-called primitive human beings nor the prehistoric ones would be "human" in the full sense of the word discussed here. Moreover, a dispassionate glance at the twentieth century, and the beginning of the twenty-first century, leads us to doubt very seriously whether humanity these days as a whole is any more human than many thousands of years ago.

Such a vision of human progress seems to us to be anthropologically and psychologically unacceptable.

If it were actually true, present-day humanity would excommunicate the rest of humanity. Those "beings" would not be our brothers, nor would they be humans such as ourselves. They perhaps would be our ancestors in the chain of evolution, yet with no possible communion or ontological communication, unless we are simply talking about biogenetic continuity. And, in fact, there are prehistoric studies that do not differ substantially from investigations on the flora and fauna on our planet. Here also the notion of *karman* is enlightening when it comes to the relationship with past humanity, not being either solely biological nor strictly historical; it is *karmic*.⁶ Man is something more than an animal and something less than a God.

Apart from this psychological dyscrasia making it impossible for us to understand a "primitive being," there are also other important consequences. It is not just that problems with hermeneutic philosophy and historical comprehension, and so on, are fraught with countless difficulties: on top of all that, quite the worst thing of all is that our human existence would be cut off from that which is most profound, stable, and indeed most universal in our earthly pilgrimage. Better said, "modern, civilized" human beings seek to commit this *anthropocide* that precedes *cosmocide*—although without success. In fact, modern Western people have lost a large proportion of their sense of existence pure and simple and cling persistently to

⁴ For a brief summary of the state of the subject in question it is well worth consulting Bouyer (1962), along with works by Eliade, Heiler, Leeuw (1949), and others, mentioned in other places.

⁵ As a sample, the praiseworthy effort of Gusdorf (1984), to once more connect "modern humanity" with the "mythical" human being as ever was. The work of Barfield (1958), written from a standpoint critical of the pan-scientific vision of the world, could nonetheless also be of help for our purpose. On this subject, see Durand (1996); Hübner (1985); Meslin (1978). Articles appearing in the *Recherches Philosophiques Africaines* magazine of la Faculté de Théologie Catholique of Kinshasa may give an idea of the wealth of African philosophical thinking.

⁶ See "La legge del *karman* e la dimensione storica dell'uomo," in Panikkar (2000/XXVII), pp. 353–78.

their conscious awareness to subsist; they do not "live" unless they are awake, they do not feel themselves to be human unless they more or less consciously think or want something, that is to say, thinking that they think and observing themselves wanting. Hence, life has to be "purpose," has to be "pro-ject," and prayer, to take one instance, has to be thought and volition. . . . Let us hasten to make it clear that we have said "modern civilized" man, and not Western man—who still has extremely deep and living roots.⁷

Primordial human beings are there, are present, they know they are human beings. Yet, even while they know this, they still have not cut the umbilical cord that joins them to heaven and earth, since they do not know what separated man could be, something that would entail segregation from the rest of the universe. They know they are "*humus*," man that is not detached from heaven or earth, and know they are not the absolute monarchs of creation. If one takes spirituality to be the way in which man undertakes his quest for salvation, for plenitude, prehistoric spirituality can plausibly be identified with the very life of human beings, all of it experienced and considered to be a rite, in other words, a sacral act in which what is human and what is divine work together to assist the cosmos to its destiny. Spirituality is rite, and rite is life itself. All is but a ritual action, and because of this, because of not having the slightest notion of the possible existence of a profane sphere, rite itself is not distinguished from the totality of common everyday actions. The living human being "does" works, forges his or her salvation, since life is nothing else but this: the path toward salvation, the chance of emerging fully into being. It is not that much has to be done on the path, including the putting into practice of the means for salvation; it is not that religion is one of these many things, perhaps the most important one that man has to realize, but rather that life itself is this realization or it is nothing at all. There are no vacations or rest days in a religious life, as there are not in events of the heart. There are no rest periods since these are not actions juxtaposed to life, as we live it, which wear one down and need to be replaced; rather it is the very dynamism of existence. Worship or, rather, total consecration and surrender to divinity or to Reality is considered obvious and as the presupposition to any act. All is *latria*. Slowly, heaven separates from the earth in man's consciousness, and the spirit of God, which moved upon the face of the water, begins to rise up into heaven. Then there will emerge what would later be known in the West as idolatry and the new more or less known religious forms. At which point, the more or less personified Gods would appear, in conflict with each other and with man.

While lacking the epiphenomenon that we call civilization, prehistoric man is totally human and lives the deepest profundity of his existence.

We are not going to believe that only we are true human beings considering as substantial what is an accidental perfection in our earthly pilgrimage. It is significant to observe that those of the "renaissance" and "humanist" periods, who were shocked to think that humanity had, up until then, believed that the Earth was the center of the universe, were themselves convinced that their human "type" embodied the very essence of humanity and felt inclined to excommunicate from humanity those who were not or would not be "humanists." That which present-day human beings (offspring of recent past centuries) regard as depressive anxieties and harrowing feelings that they suffer as a result of their dislocation from society and all its psychic superstructures, leaving them frighteningly naked, might actually be a (redeeming) remnant of humanity, which resists being swallowed up by the "civilized" or, even worse, "technologicalized" way of life.

⁷ This seems to me to bear witness to the importance latent in the work of M. Eliade, the unity of the human race as "*Homo religiosus*." See especially Eliade (1949–67; 1967–83).

This does not mean there have not been aberrations, as there always have been at all times. We are talking about prehistoric man and not some putative prehumanoids that belong more to the animal kingdom than to the realm of man—without wishing to enter into discussion about the theory of evolution.⁸

Whatever may have happened, the truth is that spirituality of the pre-Vedic period reveals, even so, a human profundity and telluric dimension from which later Hindū spirituality would emerge.

The Indus Civilization

From 1921 onward the ancient and astounding culture of the Indus Valley, in the north of India, came to be known: the immense city of Harappa in the Sindh (along with many other sites that were discovered, at least thirty-five have been located up to the present), which has not been studied with exactitude, having been despoiled to provide building material in more recent periods. And, seven hundred kilometers away, the buried city of Mohenjodaro has brought priceless information from this dawn of the historical period. It seems that Mohenjodaro was built and rebuilt at least seven times. The most reliable calculations give its antiquity as three thousand years before Christ, and there appear to be great similarities with Mesopotamian culture. Unfortunately, in spite of many exhaustive attempts to decipher the language on the famous stamps of Mohenjodaro, up until now this has not been achieved (except for a stamp with cuneiform transcription found in Mesopotamia).⁹

The little that can be definitively said about this culture from the religious viewpoint could be expressed as follows:

This religion unquestionably constituted one of the bases of later Hinduism—the basic element upon which, and occasionally against which, the Aryan religion was established. As it seems, when the Aryan invasion took place, this culture, which extended throughout the Sindh, Beluchistan, and a large part of the Panjab, was already past its peak. Thus, the historic substratum of Hinduism dates back to the third millennium before Christ, and a great proportion of religion practiced by the Indian population to this day can be traced back to this five-thousand-year-old source. Hence, it is not correct to say that this civilization collapsed owing to the Aryan invasion. Very possibly, earlier forces had already destroyed those flourishing cities.¹⁰

There were very likely icons, in the sense of sacred images, that were worshiped. The discovery of little statues in typical *yoga* postures is not sufficient evidence to state that *yoga* spirituality has its origins here. After all, these postures are very common throughout the entire Orient.¹¹ Neither is there sufficient evidence to be able to state that the phallic symbol that later would become the symbol of Śiva exactly corresponds to similar shaped rocks found in Mohenjodaro. What we do know is that this symbol would be later condemned (to no avail) in the *Vedas*.

⁸ See Cela Conde (2001).

⁹ The interpretation of the reliable H. Heras cannot be considered as being definitive. See Heras (n.d.a).

¹⁰ Heine-Geldern (1956) reintroduces doubt about this by dating the Aryan invasion to around 1200, thus making it responsible for the fall of Harappa.

¹¹ A recent increase in knowledge of pre-Columbian American culture shows that the Incas and Aztecs, among other tribes, employed these “yogic” postures. Very possibly, we are dealing with an elemental human position, so that it would be useless to search for other explanations, although the field for investigation remains wide open.

Their dead were still buried, although there is also evidence of cremation being practiced. The large quantity of animal statues found would suggest that they worshiped animals or esteemed them for their sacrificial value. Worship of the Mother Goddess seems to have existed with sufficient probability. It would have been the forerunner to *śakti*, the feminine version of Śiva, which would later become popular in Hinduism. Regarding the existence of what is known as ProtoŚiva, it is extremely difficult to give a definitive answer here.¹² It does not appear to be totally out of the question that this is where the worship for Śiva had its source and origin. It is also common knowledge that Śiva does not appear in the *Vedas*.¹³

In recent years, motivated by the need to give historic justification to the ideology of Hindū neofundamentalism known as *Hindūtva*—supported by a previous government in India—there has been an attempt at distorting history by putting back the emergence of the *Vedas* almost a couple of thousand years, linking it with the civilization at Harappa, and thus denying the significance of the Aryan migration to the Indian subcontinent.¹⁴ Later research has definitively demonstrated the shakiness of the hypothesis, the false evidence of the so-called deciphering of the Harappa seals on coins and ideological connections with the above-mentioned ideologies.¹⁵

The Dravidic Culture

We cannot go any further without mentioning the connection between the pre-Aryan civilization in the northeast of India and the Dravidic culture, with which it shares the indisputable basis of all subsequent culture, being as it is one of the cornerstones of Hinduism.

Much has been written recently about Dravidic mystery. It appears that these peoples were associated with the Mediterranean culture and that both Crete and Lycia have common links with Tamilnadu, in southern India. It also seems that, in spite of being concentrated in the south of India, as the original Dravidic languages indicate, they had a part to play in the evolution of the pre-Vedic civilization in the north, which according to some had come down through Iran.¹⁶

However that may be, it seems nevertheless to be characteristic of Dravidic spirituality that from its beginning there was a predominance of the affective, mystical element over the intellectual, which latter would be a typical Aryan element.¹⁷ If *homa* or *igneos* and bloody sacrifice are typical of Aryan religion, *pūja* or pure ritual of worship and praise would be the Dravidic legacy in Hinduism. Yoga spirituality seems to more likely take its source from the Dravidic soul than from the Aryan.

Analogically to how the typical Dravidic social pattern is matriarchal (even today) and the Aryan, patriarchal monogamy, Hinduism appears to be a marriage between the Aryan masculine element (sacrifice, intellection, strength, action) and the Dravidic feminine one (praise, *bhakti*, contemplation, a certain emotional refinement, etc.). If it is true that the

¹² See D.R. Bhandarkar, (n.d.). For a summary of the subject in question, see Eliade (1999).

¹³ For bibliographical reference for this period, see Cumming (1939) (containing abundant material); MacKay (1945); Marshall & MacKay (1996); Mode (1944); Wheeler (1953).

¹⁴ See Jha-Rajaram (2000).

¹⁵ See, for instance, articles by Indologists, historians, and other authorities in *Frontline* (India's National Magazine) 16/19, October 13, 2000, 4–16.

¹⁶ See R.D. Banerji (1927); S.K. Charterji (1958); Heras (1942); and Régamey (1935).

¹⁷ Even today the inhabitants in Southern India, above all the Tamils, differentiate themselves from those in the North, especially those around the Ganges—with the exception of Bengal, which is a case apart.

origin of Śiva is Dravidic, and Viṣṇu's is Aryan, Hinduism represents the synthesis between these two great conceptions of divinity. The truth is that in Hinduism both chthonic and Gnostic elements form part of its most profound nature. This is what endows it its wealth.¹⁸

Popular Spirituality

It is all too common for treatises on Hinduism to overlook a trait that Hindū *dharma* has not lost and that has allowed what scholars call "Hinduism" as a "superior religion" to flourish alongside the magical and "primitive" character of less developed religiosities, not just simultaneously but also in tandem with it.

In fact, one of the characteristics of popular cults in Hinduism is its junction with chthonic forms of piety and worship—as a section in the *Atharva-veda* seems to indicate. In this *Veda* there are remains and echoes of almost certainly pre-Vedic worship that are also present in other Vedas and to which are given a higher-level symbolism. This movement is strangely the inverse to what we find in other traditions. In many of these, popular celebrations are presented as vulgar versions, in the most noble and etymological sense of the word, of sophisticated rites and celebrations. In the case in point, it seems to be that the *Vedas* take in popular religiosity, as many signs indicate, and insert it into a superior symbolism. That which is popular is that which is primary.¹⁹

In fact, it has nearly always been so in all religion, yet many of the so-called "great religions" have been able to assimilate and transform that which is primordial by eliminating its origins—although it will continually reemerge in what we have referred to as vulgarizations. In Hinduism they peacefully coexist.

From the point of view of the phenomenology of religion we could say those religions with a founder involve innovation and a breaking with tradition with respect to the religiosity of their times. What came before becomes outmoded or is transformed to be able to accommodate it within the new charism. Not without a certain malicious irony, some scholars call these new movements "artificial religions." Under the influence of this mentality there has been a wish to present Hinduism as a *novum* that would be the "Vedic religion." Yet the *Vedas* themselves are the result of a more or less peaceful symbiosis, the encounter with (or collision) between the Aryan and Dravidic—using this last word as symbol of the autochthonous element prior to the Aryan invasion.

It is not possible to sum up popular spirituality in a few words, a spirituality that has been preserved from time immemorial in present-day India, but, as we have to say something, so as not to commit a greater sin of omission, perhaps we could venture to say that an integral sense of that which is sacred provides a common denominator for this spirituality. In saying this, we would like to stress the primacy of what is religious above anything else—in other words, that the task that man has come to fulfill in this world is, above all, if not exclusively, a religious task. But here religion does not mean a "virtue" or "facet," but rather, the very characteristic or essence of human *existence*. It is because of this we have called it the integral sense of that which is sacred.²⁰

¹⁸ It is essential to mention Dumézil (1958). For an evaluation of his prodigious work see Littleton (1966).

¹⁹ See Agrawala (1970).

²⁰ By way of example, see the excellent monographic work of Ayroohuzhiel (1983) in the Malayalam language, on the popular beliefs of Chirakkal, a city of around thirty thousand inhabitants (1971 census) in the north of Malabar (Kerala), showing that popular religiosity is truly alive among that population.

Perhaps this sense could be described as a special experiencing of connection with nature as a profound sense of the intrinsic hierarchy in all things and actions. If the characteristic of African spirituality seems to be the predominance of its telluric aspect, and what, phenomenologically speaking, distinguishes the West is the intellectual dimension of its religions, India finds itself at a midpoint in that both aspects are found fused together in its eminently Bhaktic spirituality, within which love arises from the chthonic levels of the Earth up to the highest intellectual levels of man.²¹

This strikes us as being an important observation to be made at this stage, before properly describing Hinduism, which we shall now proceed to do.

One other interesting study among many others is Thomas & Taylor (1983), which describes the culture among the Indian population from various points of view.

²¹ See Panikkar (1961/12).

REVELATION—ŚRUTI

Hinduism properly begins with the *Vedas*, which emerge as the fruit of the encounter between aboriginal religiosity and that of the Aryan peoples.¹

Indian culture, as with the majority of ancient cultures, was an oral culture much before being a written one. Word of mouth counts for more than the written word. Even today there are people who are willing to listen to a sacred sermon at a temple for hours at a time, or any fruitful discourse, come to that, but they will be reluctant to sit down in private and read a Bible that they may have been given free by Christian missionaries.

The first period of Hinduism is significantly based on the *Śruti*, which does not mean “the written word” but rather “word of mouth,” the Word listened to, heard, and crystallized in faithfully transmitted “audition,” at first just orally or perhaps aided and abetted by the same Word, still being listened to, written down.² In fact, *Śruti* means “ear” as in the instrument for hearing: that by which and with which we hear—not really what is heard, but rather that which enables us to hear.³

Given that *śruti* was formed by the *Vedas*, it has sometimes been morphologically compared to Scripture in the same sense as the Koran or the Bible. Thus, in talking of the great Scriptures of humanity, the sacred books of different religions are considered indiscriminately.⁴ To limit ourselves to the above-mentioned examples we could say that while the Koran, in orthodox Islamic conception, *contains* the Revelation of God to man, and the Bible, directly or indirectly, *narrates* the most outstanding deeds and sermons of the Revealer, *śruti* is Revelation itself.⁵ It does not contain doctrine so much as an injunction of what needs to be done to be able to follow the path to salvation. Its

¹ See Aguilar & Matas's important contribution (1991), which presents a convincing overview based on the tension between *arīs* and *surīs*, with the aid of the texts in the *Rg-veda*. See also Manessy-Guitton (1958).

² Coming from the root word *śru*, which means to hear, cf. Panini's explanation in *Astadhyai* III.3.94. In the preface of the translator's edition of 1891, at the height of the British Empire, the world's first grammarian is compared to Euclid and his geometry. Perhaps the translator was well aware that grammar and geometry could be considered as being the respective symbols for East and West—although Panini comes before Euclid, who lived in the third century BC.

³ Up until today, a large proportion of university students need to read something and repeat it out loud (and quite often chant it) to be able to study and learn. It is a sign of increasing Western influence that this custom, which was still alive in the 1950s, has practically disappeared in this new millennium. Modern studies point to the hypothesis that chanting, along with rhythmical body movement, increase one's capacity of concentration and memory when learning.

⁴ See *The Great Scriptures* (papers presented at the first Seminar of the Union for the Study of Great Religions), published by Mahadevan (1956). Recently dozens of publications have appeared that reproduce “the sacred Scriptures of the world”—although the word “Scripture” may make one think that a book is the foundation of all religion, something that is not true for Hinduism nor for Christianity: these two religions, among others, are religions of the Word, rather than religions of the “Book.”

⁵ See *BU* II.4.10; *MaitU* VI.32.

field is not so much orthodoxy as orthopraxis. One must hear and then act. When later on the *Vedānta* interprets the *śruti* in terms of knowledge, it repeats over and over again that it concerns special *sui generis* knowledge that includes within itself the highest form of action, although here we must be extremely careful with our use of words. For instance, while the Jewish revelation is the “revelation” of a God (YHWH) to his people, especially through Moses, “revelation” in the *Vedas* does not as such come from the outside, from a God that speaks or reveals, but rather from an internal “revelation” of a truth that “we hear” when listened to properly (especially in the *Vedas*). Hence, it is only for those who are initiated that the *Vedas* can be “revelation.” Those who are not prepared will not receive it. A more academic way to describe this would be to state that the hermeneutics of a text require its context. But in this case the context is us ourselves; it is the prepared (initiated) being who approaches Vedic revelation via faith.⁶ Ignorance of this context has led to more than one misunderstanding of Hinduism, as it has with many other religions. The debate between the *nayayika* and the *mimamsaka* is classical within Hinduism, the first defending heterodox opinions of the *Vedas* as *pauruṣeya*, against the theory of the latter who were in favor of the *apauruṣeya*. The first-mentioned have it that they, the *Vedas*, are a work of human design,⁷ while the latter affirm that they are impersonal because they are a manifestation of pure Transcendence, within our similarly purified Immanence, without any other intermediate than the simple retransmission by the *ṛṣi*, the ancient sages who had received them through direct audition.⁸ A fundamentally important text from one of the shortest Upaniṣads describes the enlightenment of someone who sees everything in his *ātman* and his *ātman* in everything and, as a result, makes the distinction between the *ṛṣi* (in the *kavi* text, the poet) and the *maṇiṣi* (the intellectual, the thinker).⁹ The revelation is revealed to the enlightened one, the complete human being. There is no objective revelation; neither is there merely a subjective one. This a-dual experience of reality is fundamental to the task of not misunderstanding Indian spirituality—as we shall be mentioning over and over again.

It cannot be truly said that the *Vedas* have an author, since they are not “scripture.” They are in truth a still living, sonorous echo from the Transcendence of our Immanence that receives the message of salvation, which is not aimed at mere human reason but rather the entire human being, even when later schools tell us that man’s essence lies in his intellect. The *śruti* is, therefore, Word before it is Scripture.¹⁰ It is not the revelation of a truth but rather the actual salvific truth (of salvation). In this sense it is a Message, an “angelia” that requires being heard and carried out.

⁶ See *Vivekacudamani* by Śaṅkara for the necessary conditions to receive the liberating message in the *Vedas*.

⁷ De *Puruṣa* (man); see Glossary.

⁸ *Ṛṣi* means “seer”; see Glossary.

⁹ *IsU* 6–8; and that is how ancient and modern commentators see it.

¹⁰ “The word, as such, from the viewpoint of the New Testament is a *heard word* and, accordingly proclaimed, and not precisely written” (Ratzinger, in Rahner & Ratzinger, 1961, 50). We would have equally been able to quote any current work on liturgical theology. See Rom 10:17.

If one requires a comparison with Christianity this will be with the liturgical presence of Christ in the celebration of the mystery of the Bread and of the Word rather than simply the “Bible” as a book that contains a doctrinal message, on par with historical events. The conception emphasized by Protestant theology—that the liturgical reading of the Bible retransmits to us in a certain fashion the grace of Christ—could also offer a term of comparison.

It is worthwhile in this respect to remember that for the first generations of Christians until well into the Middle Ages, "the Scriptures" exclusively meant the Old Testament.¹¹ The New Testament was not considered "Scripture."¹² The New Testament, before being a testimony to a faith that allows us to interpret "Scriptures," is the "Word" that requires being heard and that as such begets faith.¹³ The Gospel of Christ is not written. The Gospel writers are only telling us something, since if they had not, the world would not contain books that should be written.¹⁴ Let us say it again: Christianity is not a religion of the Book, but of the Word—as is Hinduism.

If *śruti* cannot be translated as "scripture," then really it cannot be translated as "Revelation" either, understood in the same sense as in Jewish-Christian and Moslem religiosity, as the revealing divine locution of salvific truths to which man alone would never have been able to attain. *Śruti* is a cryptic word that not only has to be intellectually deciphered and interpreted, but above all worshiped and "experienced" in such a way that it leads us to discovering reality, which *is* already within us. The Hindū notion of *avatara* (roughly translated as "reincarnation") is closer to revelation, in the sense of manifestation of God in human form, than *śruti*.

Śruti is a living word that, when vitally penetrating within me (which is why faith is required), fertilizes me, so to speak, and takes me to a level of true reality, unfolding before me that transcendental truth that in any other way would remain inaccessible and incomprehensible.

From the above, one gets a glimpse of the difficulty of any precipitated comparison and of all criticism that does not take into account the internal point of view of both parts compared. Without going any further we could state that the Christian notion of revelation is not presented on the same plane as, and thus not in competition with, what we find in Hinduism.

Christian revelation is the divine self-manifestation in Jesus Christ. It does not consist of phrases, formulas, or doctrines either *primarily* or *exclusively* on historic deeds, but rather of the cosmotheandric persona of Christ who speaks, acts, and reveals himself, not only in the historic past, but also in the actual present and in the supra-temporal of the tempiternity.¹⁵ The Hindū conception of revelation could be better resumed as the internal enlightenment obtained through mediation of the *śruti*, which allows us to discover the true dimension of things and authentic divine reality, and with this we are saved.¹⁶

Hence, "Revelation" is not the best translation for *śruti*. Any revelation entails a revealer and, at least in a large segment of Hinduism (the *mīmāṃsā*), God is excluded as being something beyond revelation. Perhaps we could translate *śruti* as manifestation, epiphany of the ultimate reality, or, playing around with its etymology, as the boom, the sonority, the music, the echo of the ultimate reality, not as its effect, but as its sound, as its vocal dimension, as the Word, the *Logos* of that very same reality. The *Vedas* do not

¹¹ See 2 Cor 3:1ff. and Ratzinger's clear formulation, "It is well known and should not be forgotten that only the Old Testament is considered to be 'Scripture,' while the message of Christ is precisely the 'spirit' that teaches us to understand the Scriptures" (Rahner & Ratzinger, 1961), p. 47.

¹² See in Congar (1960), pp. 47ff. The patristic quotes on the subject.

¹³ See Rom 10:17.

¹⁴ See Jn 21:25.

¹⁵ See Glossary.

¹⁶ "The real meaning of the Revelation seems to us not to be a external message sent to humankind from the exterior, but rather a divine gust (*afflatus*) that arises from the interior, the result of an inspiration due to being inebriated with God" (Ranade, 1926), p. 9.

seek to be the revelation of God, but rather the transmission of that which God at first *was*, primordial tradition and immediate epiphany for whoever receives the message and puts it into practice.¹⁷

Not all of the *Vedas* follow the same pattern as what we have just said. From earliest times, tradition has distinguished three great segments with particular aims: action, meditation, and salvation, which we will broaden upon in the following section.

Vedic Spirituality (2000–1000 BC)

Although the Upaniṣads form part of the *śruti*, and therefore, of the *Vedas* in their broadest sense, we shall give them more consideration at a later stage.

According to traditional teachings, the *Vedas* contain three great sections: the *karma-kāṇḍa*, which describe the rituals and which are mainly contained in the *mantras* and the *brāhmaas*; the *upasāna-kāṇḍa*, or the section that incorporates meditation and the purification of the mind, which is more explicitly dealt with in the *Āraṇyaka*; and the *jñāna-kāṇḍa*, which are the teachings that lead to “realization” (or perhaps spiritual bliss, or *mokṣa*, salvation, liberation) and are contained within the Upaniṣads.¹⁸

In fact, Indian culture does not evince the same talent for classification as the West: there are rarely watertight compartments, since everything seems to interlock, and any kind of rigorous classification would be a mere abstraction that eliminates life, even that of thought.

The *Vedas* are usually divided up into four great collections (*samhitās*): *Rg-veda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajur-veda*, and *Atharva-veda*, each one of them comprising various books, each containing *mantras*, *brāhmaṇas*, *āraṇyakas* and Upaniṣads, that is, hymns, sacred rites, allegorical interpretations, and doctrinal treatises, respectively, the most important having been written between the dates of 2000 and 500 BC (excluding some of the later Upaniṣads, some of which date from as late as medieval times).

The spirituality of the *Vedas* could perhaps be taken as focused on two main themes: prayer and sacrifice. We could also look into some other topics mentioned by Śaṅkara in the introduction to the *black Yajur-veda*: *alaukika upayas*, “unworldly means” to achieve either wisdom or all the different objects of our desire. The *Vedas* are such a dense forest that anyone can rest beneath the shade of any tree they choose. Without any claim to sum up the Vedic message, I think that these two epithets could be of use to unravel its spirituality.

Praise forms the most prominent part of the most important of the *Vedas*, the *Rg-veda*. It becomes obvious, from whatever standpoint, that Vedic hymns are not simply naturalist poetry,¹⁹ nor are they highly wrought or artificial rhetoric;²⁰ they are liturgical chants with religious form and content.²¹ The *Vedas* issue from cosmic silence and break the unspoken word to sing the praises of Reality or of Life, of Creation and of the Creator, we could say. But they are not simply aesthetic hymns, nor even poetic or sentimental religious effusion. The hymns of the Veda are even more than chanted praise; they are aimed, in truth, at one or another Divinity, or better still, one or another aspect of divinity, since as the *Rg-veda* says,

¹⁷ See this volume, Section II, ch 1, “On the Hermeneutics of Tradition in Hinduism.”

¹⁸ On Vedic spirituality one can consult (apart from the works cited), Bergaigne (1963); A. B. Bose (1954) (in spite of the author’s “understandable” nonunderstanding of Christianity); Keith (1989); MacDonell (1995); Millar (1974); Renou (1953); Tola (1968a; 1968b).

¹⁹ Thus, for instance, Oldenberg (1905).

²⁰ As, for example, Bergaigne (n.d.).

²¹ As Gonda (1960–63), p. 1:21 (refuting the two previous positions), very well acknowledges.

"that which is One, is described by sages in many ways."²² Yet Vedic praise is not just mere individual piety, but rather it is liturgical praise. The resistance to the *Vedas* being recited by foreigners or translated into other languages was not only national xenophobia, but rather it followed an authentic religious attitude. The *Vedas* are not profane science; they are sacred action. This is the reason why "the arcane discipline," common in so many traditions, has maintained the *Brahmanic* prohibition on teaching the *Vedas* to foreigners in India almost down to our times, let alone translate them. Vedic hymns are liturgical, and liturgy cannot be translated by just anyone or be celebrated by noninitiates. Vedic praise reaches Divinity because it is thanksgiving or petition, but at bottom always that of a Hindū worshiper.²³

Praise is not thanksgiving; it is more complimentary. It is not the recognition of received grace, but rather the expression of deep-down happiness, spontaneous singing of the enjoyment of life, the external projection of something that comes from within. And, indeed, one of the first impressions one has of the *Vedas* is its optimism and its positive vision of reality. Badness and pain are not denied, and neither is punishment; but its most outstanding message is that of praise.

Praise in Vedic hymns is in truth a sacrifice. This is the peculiar thing about Vedic spirituality. All creation is a sacrifice, and our role in this temporal world is to pass through the creating sacrifice again inversely and return to God. Sacrifice is the essence of religion and the only path to salvation. It is not the intention or goodwill that saves us, nor is the amount or quality of our knowledge what can save us. No one can save themselves. Knowledge, goodwill, and intentions may be necessary conditions to be able to obtain salvation, but salvation can only be the fruit of (divine) action, which includes us all. This is what the essence of sacrifice consists of. It is the altar that purifies the offering and not vice versa.²⁴ Sacrifice by definition is cosmotheandric action, through which man, along with the cosmos, is saved. It is through sacrifice that the world really turns. "If the priest were not to offer sacrifice in the morning, that day the sun would not rise," states one text,²⁵ which should not be regarded as magic causality but rather as man's consciousness and responsibility, priest of creation, participating in the cosmic correlations of the universe. Everything obeys sacrifice, because it is through this that everything is done and everything is made whole.²⁶

The shift in meaning of this word in the majority of languages that have gone through the Manichaeism, Jansenism, Puritan, and certain Christian impacts is very significant: sacrifice went from meaning the "doing of sacred (saintly) deeds," *sacrum facere*, to meaning a difficult and painful action that one tolerated or even brought about oneself for the "benefit" of others.²⁷ There is something extremely noble in the vicarious satisfaction and experience of solidarity

²² RV X.114.5. See also X.83, and I.164.46; II.1; III.54.17.

²³ We have already stressed that the first interpretation of a text cannot be separated from its context; we would add that, to be complete, we must also know its pretext—but this would lead to strong criticism (of exploitation and preserving the privileged position of certain castes; but as the Spanish proverb has it: *lo cortés no quita lo valiente* [one can be courteous and still be bold]).

²⁴ See Mt 23:19.

²⁵ SB II.3.1.5.

²⁶ On sacrifice, see Hubert & Mauss (1897–98); Levi (1898); Warnach (1960) (an excellent monograph).

²⁷ The Sanskrit word *yajña* (which corresponds to the *asvesta yasna*) means worship, cult, praise, honor, and naturally sacrifice in its original meaning. See Glossary. See the Greek *agios*, saint [*hazomai*, worship, honor]. Reverential fear [*agnos*] has been explained broadly by Otto (2001). On that which is sacred, see Ries (1978–86; 1982; 1983; 1995).

of the Mystic Body of Humanity and indeed of all Creation, but as with everything sublime it can degenerate into just another aberration. However that may be, the Vedic *yaña* has nothing to do with all this, and as we have mentioned, sacrifice here is human participation in the act through which the world is created and recreated.²⁸

The Period of the Upaniṣads (1000–600 BC)

The Upaniṣads make up the core of Hindū thought and the basis for all development that followed. The different schools of spirituality would be supported upon them. In fact, though, not all the Upaniṣads teach the same doctrine.²⁹ However, traditional commentators deny this statement, and do so basing themselves as much on the belief that “revelation” cannot be contradicted as on actual tradition. Nonetheless, the fundamental *Brahma-sūtra*³⁰ text does not say that the “doctrine” is the same; it states rather that there is harmony, congruence, and the whole tradition is unanimous in interpreting the text as meaning that *Brahman* is the “object” and is what is taught throughout the Upaniṣads. The aim is the same, the objective aimed at is identical, even though doctrines may differ. The *śruti* show a way, a path, before giving it any interpretation. In other words, even if the intellectual content of the different Upaniṣads may vary, their spirituality is coherent.³¹ We shall now attempt to summarize this.³²

Although replete with philosophical content, they are not, in fact, a merely rational philosophical treatise, but rather a poem on inner spirituality. On occasions there have been attempts to present the Upaniṣads as a break with the spiritual world of the *Vedas*, as a sort “illustration” of rebelling against radicalism and formalism toward which India had gravitated shortly after the first millennium. However, at heart, there is a perfectly continuous line of development between the *Vedas* and the Upaniṣads. The latter continue with the *Vedas*’ message, stressing one essential point, implicit in the *Vedas*, but yet to be made explicit to human consciousness.

Cosmic consciousness and the integral conception of sacrifice in the earlier period are now interiorized. Salvation through ritual action is not denied, but it is discovered that true action is not the external, but rather that which has an inner soul; intention and knowledge, yet not just as collective or epistemological factors, but rather exponents of human reality, manifested in an ontology unattached from metaphysics. What matters is the intention, because what counts is man. The splitting of human consciousness has come about: the consciousness of oneself. Man has lost the innocence of his ecstatic mind directed only at worldly things to discover the self, and becomes aware that his spirit is, in the final analysis, what truly counts. *Vedic* sacrifice becomes the sacrifice of the intellect, and the exactitude of external action, which before was considered to be the necessary condition for action to possess the total ontological weight of the only true order—that is to say, the sacred order now becomes focused on rightness of intention, on the knowledge

²⁸ Panikkar (2001/XXV), pp. 464–528, where one can find the main Vedic texts on sacrifice and where its essence is explained.

²⁹ See Hirianna (1999), p. 53, as well as DuBois (2002), pp. 275–317.

³⁰ *Tat tu samanvayāt*, BS 1.4. (“But this is the harmonic and unitary intention” of all the *sūtri*: *brahman*).

³¹ This intuition may throw light on the current much debated problem of “religious pluralism.”

³² There is a vast bibliography on the Upaniṣads. There are very good translations in most European languages.

of what one is about. Whoever “knows” is saved because knowing is nothing other than the sacrifice of the intellect.³³

And so, what does one have *to do* to be saved? The salvific action of sacrifice of the first period now becomes the sacrificer’s inner action. In other words, the transcendentals³⁴ become unfolded: the *Being* of the Vedic period here is revealed as the *Truth*. Later on, as we shall see, this *Truth* is discovered to be *Good*. The essence of *Bhakti* is in this last discovery. And in the end, the *Vedānta* along with its mysticism would discover this Being to be *One*, which is Truth and Good.

Therefore, Knowing the Truth would be the Upaniṣads’ answer to the question of salvation.

What is this Truth? And again a short sharp reply: “That is you,”³⁵ “I am *Brahman*,”³⁶—the *Ātman-Brahman* equation in a word.³⁷ How these *maha-vakyani* (great phrases and aphorisms)³⁸ from the Upaniṣads should be interpreted is left open to discussion in all schools, yet there is one thing that is universally recognized as being a message from the Upaniṣads: salvation depends on one’s recognition of the divine initiation within us. Nonetheless, it does not concern mere conceptional knowledge, but rather true experience of faith, of a certain intuition that is vividly aware of the above-mentioned equation, and becomes aware that my most profound “I” is not my ego but rather it is God, and cannot be anything else but God. Thus, this faith saves, not because that through it a transcendental God comes to our aid, so to speak, but because such knowledge is much more than an epistemological adaptation that affords us a glimpse of the existence of Salvation; it is an ontological realization that permits us to “be” that which we know.³⁹

One other characteristic in the Upaniṣads is the game conjugated between an a-personal conception of God and a clearly theist and personal concept of Divinity. It is debatable whether this corresponds to an evolution within the actual Upaniṣads, such that theism could be taken to be the jewel in the crown of Upaniṣadic spirituality,⁴⁰ or whether this conjugation happened simultaneously, namely with the acceptance of the personal and nonpersonal aspects of the Divinity, as later interpretation in the *Advaita* inclines to do. This is an extremely important theoretical problem, full of practical consequences, and the cause of a double spiritual stream in Hinduism itself.⁴¹

From the merely speculative viewpoint perhaps the central issue of the Upaniṣads lies in that well-known question on the ontological principle of knowing: What is that, which

³³ See BG IX.15.

³⁴ See Glossary.

³⁵ CU VI.8.7–9.4ff.

³⁶ BU I.4.10.

³⁷ MandU 2.

³⁸ See Glossary.

³⁹ Let us not forget that the split between epistemology and ontology in what was and still is the so proudly self-proclaimed “Age of Enlightenment” is only (partially) justified within the limited parameters of this very same “Illustration.”

⁴⁰ In the opinion of Zaehner (1977) in his outstanding work.

⁴¹ Without going any further into the question, what we are pointing out here is another major misunderstanding due to the still too habitual hermeneutical error of interpreting the statements of a secondary culture (and religion) with the categories of the first. We are referring to the personality or nonpersonality of God. Let us just say that the same reasons given by Śaṅkara to defend God’s impersonality (avoiding anthropocentrism) are those wielded by Thomas Aquinas to state that God is personal (for having [as we have] intelligence and love). Another example of how interculturality is not only a requisite for peace but also modifies and complements our intellection of reality.

once known, all (other) things become known?"⁴² and if the answer to the question is found in the famous definition of Divinity: "The ultimate origin from whence in truth all things are born, why they live and to which they all return,"⁴³ if from the philosophical perspective, the Upaniṣads represent one of the human mind's major efforts in deciphering the world's enigma and its connection with its ultimate origin, from the point of view of spirituality perhaps it could be resumed in the no-lesser-known equation between *ātman* and *brahman*.⁴⁴

This is not the place to enter into the problems there may be with this equation.⁴⁵ We shall limit ourselves to saying that if it is susceptible to many interpretations from the philosophical viewpoint, from the point of view of spirituality it contains a double message: on one hand, the divinization of man as the ultimate end and, on the other, the path toward this divinization, or rather, the process of discovery and revelation that leads to it. If, in spite of all the meanders, complications and still apparent contradictions "all Law and Prophets speak of Christ,"⁴⁶ I do not think that anyone can deny that all the Upaniṣads do nothing other than speak of *Brahman* as the source, ultimate end, and foundation of man, or in other words, they proclaim the divinization or, if you want, the Divinity of man.⁴⁷ That this message can be understood in many ways and that it has not always been interpreted in the most ideal manner would not seem strange to anyone, but much less in Hindū circles that see that words, along with the mind that conceives them, do not ever succeed in what they mean:

"Words cannot express the bliss of Brahman, mind cannot reach it. The sage, who knows it, is freed from fear."⁴⁸

Several Vedic texts say: in the Beginning was the Word (*vac*),⁴⁹ but the word is not the beginning but is together with it. Without this mystical element, one will not be able to understand the Upaniṣads.

⁴² *MundU* I.1.3.

⁴³ *TU* II. See also *BS* I.1.2 and numerous commentaries on this fundamentally important text.

⁴⁴ See esp. *CU* III.14.3–4; *BU* I.4.10, etc.

⁴⁵ As material for a monographic study of this, we have garnered the following passages: *CU* V.II.1; VI.8.7; VII.25.2; VIII.14.1; *BU* I.4.10; II.5.19; III.4.1; III.7.23; IV.4.25, *AUV* 3; *SU* I.16; *MundU* II.2.5; II.2.9; etc. See my commentary in Panikkar (2001/XXV), pp. 953–1023.

⁴⁶ See *Lk* 24:27, 44; *2 Tim* 3:15; *1 Pet* 1:11.

⁴⁷ In various other works I have sought to provide examples of this *sensus plenior*. If St. Paul can say the "the rock was Christ" (*1 Cor* 10:4), perhaps it could be accepted *mutatis mutandis* that *Īṣvara* is the figure of Christ, that *Sat-cit-ananda* points to the Trinity, etc. It seems to me to be important to point out that the said "plenary sense" is not the meaning that Christians give to Hindū texts, but rather the more complete sense that texts acquire in the light of interculturality: the *sensus semper plenior*. This plenary meaning resembles that of the ultimate "Father" in the Western Church, Gregory the Great, in the sixth century: "[Holy] scripture grows with those who read it" (*Homilie in Hiezechielem prophetam* I.3.18). See Bori (1987); Johannis (1996); Panikkar (1994/X).

⁴⁸ See *TU* II.4 (and II.9).

⁴⁹ See pertinent texts in Panikkar (2002/XXV), pp. 108–15, 143–47.

TRADITION—*SMṚTI*

Revelation, properly speaking, ends with the *Vedas* and the Upaniṣads, and Tradition begins, that is to say, all that which is stored in *memory* to be passed on. The *Vedas* are complemented by the *Vedāṅgas* or (auxiliary) “members of the *Vedas*,” as hermeneutical means, and by the *Kalpa-sūtras*, or “aphorisms of forms (rituals).”¹

Yet before these Hindū commentaries, in the seventh to sixth centuries before Christ, there began one of the most religiously fruitful periods in the History of Man. We are referring to what has come to be known as the “Axial age” (*Achsenzeit*), after Karl Jaspers’s well-known expression.² Not just Buddha, Mahavira, *Kṛṣṇa-Vasudeva*, but also Zarathustra, Lao-tzu, Confucius (Kung-fu-tzu), Pythagoras, Heraclites (Herakleitos), Socrates (Sokrates), and major Greek and Hebrew prophets belonged to these centuries, making it the religious fulcrum of the ancient world. Humanity’s leap to religious-reflective consciousness was effected within this period. Buddhism, Jainism, Bhagavatism along with Greek and postprophetic Jewish religions are all religious phenomena inscribed within this mutation, which came about during the seventh and sixth centuries BC.

It is at this moment in time that the word “tradition” takes on its meaning. That which has been consciously passed down by ancestors is transmitted and passed on to everyone else (*tradere*), aware of the fact that in the act of transmission we reenact and necessarily change that which is being transmitted. There is no tradition without an act of reflexive memory. To be able to understand a tradition we must go back to its ecstatic, creative initial moment, then reflect upon it. It is during this axial age of humanity that man reflects upon what he has received in his consciousness. Indic culture was very possibly one of the first to have reflected upon this fact, for not believing so much in revelation not coming from transcendence as from a light that is kindled in one’s own immanence.

While *śruti* etymologically speaking means “that which is heard” (or more exactly, that which makes us hear), *smṛti* means “that which is remembered” (or rather that which allows us to remember), what we have gathered in our memory or conferred to it.³ Whereas *śruti* stands for “audition” of the reality that is happening in the receptive individual, *smṛti* means the recollections that, stored in one’s memory, are weighed up, looked into, and thus elaborated and transmitted to others. If we have taken great care to translate *śruti* as “revelation,” we should take *smṛti* as the notion of *custody* of this revelation. Nevertheless, *custody* (and this is an important point, as it illustrates the character of Hinduism to us), does not merely mean physically standing guard over a text nor the philologically exact repetition of

¹ Readers will understand that here we have a predominantly Western way of explaining this, since *śruti* and *smṛti*, revelation and tradition, cannot be separated. Memory is as such when it reminds us, or in other words, what we remember is held in our hearts (*cor*) and minds. We have already mentioned that the function of tradition is not only to recall a past time, but to remind us in the present, thus tradition becomes revelation, which is transmitted to us. The *Vedas* are not Scripture; they are living words whose faithful pronunciation is in itself revelation.

² See Jaspers (1956), pp. 11–32ff.

³ See Glossary.

a “revealed content,” but rather it means *true* tradition, that is to say, elaborated retransmission of that which is heard, since it is not the score (that is, the intellectual content) that has to be transmitted, but the music as a whole, and this can only be done if the original music is “retransmitted.” It concerns retransmitting that which is heard. Hence, music may be a truer retransmitter than the idea, a praxis more complete than theory. In effect, the *Dharma-sastra* make up the *smṛti* par excellence, and they are nothing other than the putting into practice the specific application of Vedic principles in the different spheres of human activity: they are obedience to the *śruti*. This does not mean that the speculative aspect is neglected; on the contrary: the *smṛti*, as subject matter, is an intellectual effort to “remember” the *śruti*. One classical example is the famed *Brahmasūtra* or collection of cryptic and condensed aphorisms that contain something approaching the *Vedas*’ quintessence.⁴

In one way or another, the *smṛti* is the *śruti* entrusted to the memory, so that it may be passed down from generation to generation. It is that which makes up true tradition in Hinduism.

Two questions immediately follow on from that: *What* is it that is transmitted? *How* is it transmitted?

To the first question the *smṛti* responds saying that what is transmitted is not the text of the *śruti*; in the first place, as we have already mentioned, the *śruti* is not a text, and second, if we were to limit ourselves to solely transmitting the *śruti* we would just have to repeat it, whereas the *smṛti* not only intellectually interprets the *śruti*, but also gives examples and applies it, that is to say, it incarnates and develops it. The *smṛti* has no authority in itself, but only when it concerns, explains, or exemplifies the *śruti*. In a word, what the *smṛti* actually transmits is the faith in that “revelation” *sui generis*, which are the *Vedas*. Without this faith, the *Vedas* would be a dead letter. Faith is that which allows them to be *śruti*, that they may be heard, that they are listened to. Without the reader’s inspiration there is no inspired book. “The letter kills.”⁵

Yet if what is translated is faith, the mode of retransmission is the speculation that nowadays might be known as philosophy or theology. Hence the form of such retransmission would be theological-practical treatise. And indeed, the different testaments attributed to the *smṛti* are all of this nature.

The Period of the *Vedāṅgas* and *Kalpa-Sūtras* (600–300 BC)

Leaving aside the controversial issue of whether Buddhism and Jainism should be considered religions independent from Hinduism, or heretical movements within Hinduism, in deference to the West’s habitual classification (and for reasons of simplification) we shall pass over these two great religions and content ourselves with saying that during this period Hinduism itself was at a low point and both ritualistically and doctrinally overblown, something that would explain Buddha’s reaction and the upsurge of Jainism, although in fact Jainism considers itself to be the older of the two religions.⁶

⁴ Traditionally attributed to Badarayana and possibly written in the second century BC (although there are some authors who consider it to have been written in the early centuries of Christianity). See original text, translation and commentaries by Vireśvarananda (1948) and the more recent and valuable version by Radhakrishnan (1960). See the literal (and bilingual) Spanish translation by Palma (1997) and the less literal version with Śaṅkara’s commentaries by Martin (2000). See also the English translation of the *Brahma-sutra-bhasya* of Śaṅkara by Gambhirananda (1965).

⁵ 2 Cor 3:6.

⁶ See Panikkar (1999/XIX). See on Jainism, Pániker (2001), which is possibly the first monograph on Jainism in the Spanish language. Now translated into English.

Bhagavatism and Śivaism also emerge during this period. We shall be looking at these at a later moment. It is now sufficient for us to mention that the first underlines the personal and unique character of Divinity and devotion or love as a mode of uniting oneself with it. The intellectual transposition of Vedic sacrifice in favor of knowledge, developed in the Upanisads, is continued here in the complementary and more simple direction of pure love. To achieve union with God and attain salvation, mere "speculative knowledge" (employing these two words in their reductionist meaning for the sake of brevity) is now not necessary. The important thing in this case is love and consecration to God. On the topic of Śivaism, suffice it to say here that Śiva is simply a common name in the *Rg-veda* (benevolent, gracious, happy . . .) and later on tradition would attach no less than 1,008 names to underpin each of his multiple aspects.

At this period we find enormous religious proliferation. New sects and religions spring up right and left. Some of them last, some peter out, and the rest are absorbed into traditional religious groups or newly emerged ones. The above-mentioned awakening to religious consciousness is reflected in this state of affairs. From this moment on, Hinduism is destined to become a luxuriant tree within which many religious movements would build their nest and accept the existing common trunk mentioned earlier.⁷

Religion becomes conscious and, along with this, consciously popular. It is distinguished from ordinary everyday life and takes on a special character. It becomes specialized in various ways, and with this the difference between that which is sacred and profane becomes accentuated. When we employ analytic reflection to define what religiosity is to us, it is done at the cost of it becoming detached from the more general background, and for this very reason can no longer be considered religious. Religion is thus ritualized and specialized, sacrifice is particularized, and man feels the call to consciously participate, reflectively, in this specifically religious labor.⁸

This period also sees the birth of various different sciences, bringing with it the consequent tension with the common, sacred, indiscriminate background from whence they had stemmed. Nonetheless, this tension would not as a rule result in separatism and allowed the Indian cultural evolution to unfold peacefully in harmony, allowing it to hold its knowledge together in one piece under the aegis of the sacred science until recently.⁹ At the moment, it is not our task to follow these paths. We shall limit ourselves to mentioning that the great construction of political science, ontonomous, yet not autonomous with regards to religion, belongs to this period in time.¹⁰

The Epic Age—The *Itihāsa* (Legends) (300 BC–AD 300)

The effervescence of the previous period crystallizes into the age in which the two great epic poems in Hinduism are finally committed to writing.¹¹

⁷ On the *Dharma-sastra*, apart from the works mentioned above, see among others Bühler (1886); Dutt (1906–8); Houghton (1925); Jha (1920–26); Kane (1958). See also Javaszal (1930); Pal (1958); Rangaswamy Aiyangar (1952).

⁸ On the *Dharma-sutra*, for an introductory orientation consult Bühler (1897); Gopal Ram (1959); Oldenberg (1886–92).

⁹ See Panikkar (1997/XXXIX).

¹⁰ On the subject of *Arthashastra*, see translations by Jolly & Schmidt (1923); see also N.C. Banerji (1927); Krishna Rao (1979); Shama Sastri (1961).

¹¹ They are the most extensive poems in humanity: the *Mahābhārata* alone with its ten thousand slokas (verses) is eight times the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together, and three and a half times the Bible.

It has been said that this is the period when *Brahmanism* becomes Hinduism, and in fact the characteristics of Hinduism can still these days be found in the two great epic poems, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which carry more authority in popular Hinduism than any other document.¹² During this period Hinduism spreads throughout the whole of Southern Asia, and these two epic poems still represent not far short of the maximum authority even these days in orthodox Hinduism.¹³

The spirituality in the *Mahābhārata* can be condensed into the known formula: *dharma-artha-kama-moṣka* (virtue-wealth-pleasure-liberation), of which we shall give more details later on. Piety is made popular and syncretistic. The altar, which in the previous period still held primacy over the temple, is overtaken by the latter, and holidays, pilgrimages, and worship of images reach their peak in popularity.

We cannot even begin to give an idea of the immense variety and richness of the *Mahābhārata*, that is to say, the great battle of the *Bharatas*. The totality of Hinduism is found condensed within it, concerning religion, culture, and a large proportion of its history. The main part of this epic, which relates the enmity between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*, dates back to almost certainly before the fifth century BC, although the manuscript cannot be considered to have been completed until the fourth century AD.¹⁴

It is common knowledge that the *Bhagavad-gītā* forms the dazzling jewel enshrined in the vast crown of the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁵

The *Rāmāyaṇa* by Valmiki is shorter, yet just as important. It was probably written before the fourth century BC. Rāma, the hero, lived between the eighth and seventh centuries prior to the Christian era. It contains the life story of Rāma, royal prince to the house of *Ayodhya*, exiled by the wicked arts of his stepmother and accompanied into exile by his faithful spouse Sita and his brother Lakṣmaṇa. During this exile, Sita is kidnapped, and is finally rescued after countless adventures. He returns to his kingdom at the end of his exile to be crowned King, going on to reign for many long years. The whole story is a hymn to *dharma*. The masterly sensitivity of its profound verses makes the *Rāmāyaṇa* one of the prime works of world literature. Valmiki's masterpiece later suffered many interpolations and had many other representations, so that there are a multitude of later versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹⁶

The Age of Myths—*Purāṇas* (600 BC–AD 300)

Tradition recognizes eighteen great *Purāṇas*, known as *Mahā-Purāṇas*, alongside which are placed many *upa-Purāṇas* or secondary *Purāṇas*, which some scholars, in their desire for

¹² See, for an introductory bibliography, De (1962); Winternitz (1996). A still fundamental work on the subject is Farquhar (1920) and also E. W. Hopkins (1986); Sidhanta (1929).

¹³ See esp. Nag (1941).

¹⁴ See translations by Jacobi (1903); Oldenberg (1922); Roy (1893–96). See also Rice (1934); Sukthankar (1944); Thadani (1933). In Spanish, there are two volumes that summarize the *Mahābhārata*: Lidchi-Grassi (1977; 1978).

¹⁵ The current bibliography on the subject of the *Gītā* is immense. See, as a brief indication, first the editions, translations, and commentaries by Aurobindo Bose (1950); Edgerton (1952); Mahadeva Sastri (1977); Modi (1956); Otto (1939); Radhakrishnan (1953); H. P. Shastri (1949); Telang (1965); Tilak (1935); and also Rajagopalachari (1941); Ranade (1959); Sirkar (1945). In Spanish, it is worth mentioning Martin (2002); Pla (1997); Riviere (1980); Tola (2000).

¹⁶ See translations by Aiyer (1954); Aurobindo Bose (1956); M. N. Dutt (1827–94); Jacobi (1893); Rajagopalachari (1957); Ramaswami Sastri (1944); H. P. Shastri (1952–59); Srinivasa Sastri (1952); Vaidya (1906); Vaudeville (1955a; 1955b). See also bilingual editions by Tulsidas (1993) and one by Valmiki (1969).

symmetry, similarly reduce to eighteen main ones.¹⁷ There is still great doubt concerning their dating.¹⁸

The *Purāṇas* are extremely extensive works on devotion, legend, myths, exemplified philosophic teachings and a great variety of rites. Along with the *itihāsa* they are usually considered to be the fifth *Veda* (*pañcama vedah*) and their influence is clearly evident right up until today. They are what make up or, even better, preserve the telluric layer of Hindū religiosity in all its mythical wealth. Indeed, one cannot claim to understand Hindū spirituality without *purāṇic* initiation. Fortunately, the lack of text and study is compensated by their extreme popularity, in such a manner that even without exhaustive knowledge of them, one can penetrate their spirit through the living tradition and festivals in contemporary Hinduism.¹⁹ In fact, no community can live without its myths, nor is any religion complete if out of humanistic or "scientific" prejudices they deny their parables and myths.²⁰

¹⁷ In spite of the recent return to recognizing their importance and the strenuous efforts to obtain critical editions and good monographs, the study of the *Purāṇas* is still in its initial stages. See documented articles in *CHI* 11: 223–300, and bibliography there indicated.

¹⁸ See Mankad (1951). "*Purāṇa* magazine" (the bulletin of the *Purāṇa* Department, All India Kaśiraja Trust), and published by the All India Kaśiraja Trust under the auspices of the Maharajah of Varanasi, is exclusively dedicated to its study.

¹⁹ There are some English translations: Bhatt (1995); Dasakhtar (1972); Dutt Shastri (1967; 1968); Kunst & Shastri (1969–70); Pargiter (1969); Shastri (1973); Swarup Gupta (1968; 1972); Ved Kumari (1968; 1973); Wilson (1972). Also very useful is Mani (1975).

²⁰ See Panikkar (1961/15).

COMMENTARIES—*BHĀṢYA*

Whereas the *smṛti* is tradition proper, the *bhāṣya* are more of a commentary and at the same time an adaptation and explanation of the *śruti*. The period of the *smṛti*, as with the *śruti*, belongs to the past, while that of the *bhāṣya* remains thematically open. We can truly state that the age of the great commentaries begins after the great epics and continues to the present day.

The Hindū *bhāṣya* can be approached from a double viewpoint: (1) intellectual commentary, and so we have the great philosophical-theological systems known as *darsana*, and (2) the vital or existential commentary, not to say practical commentary, that constitutes the backbone of the great religions, the *Āgamas*—although the separation here cannot be very strict.

The Period of the Great Philosophical Systems —*Darsana* (AD 300–700)

It is almost impossible to settle on a rigorous chronology for the spiritual history of India. Philosophical speculation had already arisen before this period, linked with the period of the Upaniṣads.

The greater part of the philosophical systems crystallize during this period, which is characterized by an effort at deepening religion with the intention of forming a bridge between popular spirituality and the requirements of the mind. It is here that the six traditional philosophical systems in orthodox Hinduism appear on the scene. As the very word *darsana* suggests (from the root word *drś* [to see]), these systems do not set out to be simple rational speculations, but rather “visions” of the world, *Weltanschauungen*, which primarily not only present a simple description of how things should be, but an actual conscious path to salvation; they are theologies or philosophies in the vital and integral sense of the word. Each and every *darsana* is, at bottom, a school on spirituality. With the exceptions of the materialist school (*cārvāka*) and in a sense Buddhism, all the other systems, including the heterodox ones (*nāstikas*), apparently coincide on the three celebrated points: *karma*, *mukti*, and *jīva* (or *ātman* or indeed *puruṣa*, that is to say, there is a soul (*jīva*) that must achieve salvation (*mukti*), adhering to the law of historical-ontological value in human action (*karma*).¹

The important thing in our case is the salvific conception of “philosophy.” Virtually none of the great philosophers sought to create their own system, nor even to do any original work on the subject. They limited themselves to commenting upon the *śruti*, to fathoming out the *śruti*’s meaning, explaining the message and assisting people in putting this into practice.²

¹ See S. N. Dasgupta (1991–95).

² On the subject of Indian philosophical systems, one needs to consult different monographic works devoted to one or another of them. We shall make do with providing references of some of the major works. S. N. Dasgupta (1991–95); Deussen (1894–1920), which has the merit of being a leading work on that which refers to philosophy in India; Frauwallner

The Period of the Great Religions —*Āgama* (AD 700–1800)

It is perhaps in this period when Hindū spirituality experiences the greatest of its moments. Hinduism has come to maturity. On one hand it is the time of the great theological concepts and schools of life and spirituality. Śaṅkara (788–820), Rāmaṇuja (1017–1137), Madhva (1199–1278), Nimbarka (twelfth century), among others, all belong to this period, as does the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (tenth century) and the rest of the devotional (*bhakti*) movements. Mysticism in Southern India also emerges in the *ālvārs*. *Śivaism*, *Viṣṇuism*, and *śaktism* assert themselves as the three main religious streams in India. At the same time, Tantrism bestows its own coloring to a large part of the spirituality of these times.

Hinduism becomes synthetic and also syncretic. There is a move to see Viṣṇu and Śiva as ultimately equivalent (*Skanda-Upaniṣad*), and the six orthodox systems of philosophy are considered by some to be equivalent or complementary.

Śivaism traditionally considers twenty-eight *āgamas*, whereas Tantrism is represented by seventy-seven. When talking about these religions we shall employ this kind of literature.

It cannot be said that Hinduism ceased being a creating force during this last period. But for reasons of systematization, perhaps it would not be amiss to say that it is an age of great commentaries (*bhāṣya*) both in the area of speculation (Vallabha [1479–1521], Caitanya [1485–1533], etc.) and of popular and mystic piety. It is the time of great spirituality centered on Rāma (*Rāmānanda* [fourteenth century]), Kabīr (1440–1518),³ Tulsīdās (1532–1623; the famous writer of the popular *Rāmāyaṇa* in Hindi), and Kṛṣṇa (Nāmdeva (1270–1350), Vallabha (fifteenth century), Caitanya (1485–1539), Tukārām (1608–1649), Eknātha (1533–1599), Mirā Bai⁴ (1498–1546), and so on and so forth.

Guru Nanak (1469–1538), founder of the Sikh religion, also dates from this period.⁵

New forms of Hinduism arise at this time and are practically established as complete, independent religions, although all of them are inserted in the common trunk of Hinduism; *Śaiva-siddhānta*, in Tamilnadu, and the *Lingayata*, in Kaṇṇāṭaka, are two examples of religions stemming from the previous period, which were to bloom in medieval India and continue on right up to these days.

If we were to write a history of Hindū spirituality this would be one of the most complex chapters, since we have to deal with *history*, *culture*, *religion*, and *philosophy* all together.

(1953–56); Hiriyanna (1999); Mahadevan (1998); and the first of its kind, Radhakrishnan (1982); the collective works published by Radhakrishnan (1967); Radhakrishnan (1996); Zimmer (1969). Another useful and didactic version (for the use of students, especially North American students) is Raju (1985). It is worthwhile mentioning the *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, directed by Potter (1970–90), for specialized studies, an extremely useful book. Also Panikkar (1997/XXXIX) and Rajadhyaksha (1997).

³ On the subject of Kabir, the works by Tukarama (1956) and Vaudeville (1955), and Lal (1921) on Mira Bai, all deserve a special mention regarding this topic. There is a small collection translated by Tagore (1945); by Vaudeville (1957); see also the study-anthology by Ezekiel (1992) and the Spanish translation by Peradejordi (2000).

⁴ See Alston (1980).

⁵ On the subject of Sikhism, see Delahoutre (1985); Greenlees (1952); MacAuliffe (1978); Piano (1971); Singh Harbans (1969); Singh Harbans (ed., 1975); Singh Kartar (1998); Singh Surindar (1961); Singh Teja (1944); Trumpf (1978); and the collective work on Sikhism (1969).

The artificialness of habitual classifications is clearly evident in the case of this period. We can and must distinguish the different meanings of each of the four words we have employed, yet we cannot separate them into four independent disciplines. History describes the framework within which culture of an age is manifested, whose soul is religion and whose critical dimension, both intellectual and congenial, is philosophy.

Terminology might seem to be a merely pragmatic matter, but (as with meta-physics) it takes on a profound sense as the mediation between these four symbols. Significantly, in the European Middle Ages, something similar happened. This is not so much a period of transition (as historians influenced by the ambience of the Age of Enlightenment would have us believe, when this term, created by humanists from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, became popular) as a period of mediation that had not abjured the ancient past and that was now open to modern times. At least, this is the meaning that can be freely applied to other periods in history outside Europe.

Indeed, we can notice this new manner in authors we have mentioned, and in many others, although it had been introduced by the not always peaceful Moslem movements, along with deep investigation into all that which was traditional. It is not surprising that Hindū mysticism increased during this period.⁶

In fact, as we have already insinuated, what we call "Hinduism" are the Hinduisms of this period, which without losing their familiar resemblances become established in indigenous religions.

The Modern Reform (1750–1950)

The spiritual influence of Western dominance in India, above all coming from the British, was just as important and comparable to the Muslim dominance during the previous period. The first inclination to adopt Western ways of life and look down upon indigenous forms was shortly abandoned by ruling classes that, from the middle of the eighteenth century, had brought in serious reforms to Hinduism, which had recently become somewhat stalled.⁷

The principle movements were religious, being on a par with social and political movements. Reforming Hinduism meant also transforming Hindū society and combating foreign domination—hence, the complexity involved in such reforms.⁸

⁶ For a classical summary, coming from the sources, from the position of Rāmanuja, Mahdva, Nimbarka, Kabir, Tulsidas, Vallabha, Caitanya, Namdev, Tukaram, the *lingayata* and the Śivaism in Kashmir, see R. G. Bhandarkar (1982), a reedition of the original from 1913, which, in spite of later research, is still vitally important.

⁷ As a "moderate" example among thousands that sum up the religious encounter with Christianity during this period, see: "Along with new knowledge came the furious attacks from the first Christian missionaries against Hinduism and Hindū society. Zealous missionaries, who did not miss any occasion to knock our religious and social institutions, acted as educators and crusaders. They opened up schools and colleges, where not only did they share academic knowledge but also taught Christianity to be the only true religion. The combination of these two forces provisionally produced in the minds of the educated classes radical skepticism or a certain inclination toward Christianity; but in the end they only managed to wake Hinduism up from its dream" (Sarma 1956). See stronger anti-Christian words to be found in A. B. Bose (1954), pp. 8ff.

⁸ The India of these times is described in A. DuBois (2001), the famous Abbé to whom Max Müller wrote a laudatory prologue and which later nationalists criticized for his all too realistic stories of the situation at that time.

The *Brāhmo Samāj*, founded in 1828 in Bengal by Ram Moham Roy (1772–1833), occupies without a doubt first place.⁹ After some ups and downs of his successors, Devendranāth Tagore (1817–1905) and Kesbah Chandra (1838–1884), the *Brāhmo Samāj* came to be practically another religion, with theist traits and outward resemblance to Christianity.

Differences here with orthodox Hinduism are rather notable: denial of the value in “scripture,” of the existence of *avatāra*, of the justification of the caste theory, along with the condemnation of any form of plurality of Gods and worship of images.

The most violent reaction against any type of compromise was that of the *Ārya Samāj*, founded by Dayāna Saraswati (1824–1883). Return to the *Vedas*, without any adaptations or reductions, is its motto. Not even the Upaniṣads or the *Gītā* are taken into consideration. It is Hinduism in its purest and most militant state that in political terms would resemble a Hindū theocracy, difficult to combine with the actual tolerant and comprehensive spirit of Hinduism itself. Salvation is exclusively granted by God, and the path is found through Vedic ritual, not only followed in spirit, but paying attention to the words.

Not all reactions have taken this direction. Locamanya (beloved leader) B. G. Tilak (1855–1920) within the social-political order,¹⁰ and Vivekananda (1863–1902), within the religious order, followed the guidelines of Rāmākṣṣṇa Paramhansa (1836–1886) and are now seen as great figures in contemporary Hinduism.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were great periods of spiritual reaction in India. The names of Gandhi (1869–1948),¹¹ Śrī Aurobindo (1872–1950),¹² Ramana Mahārṣi (1879–1950),¹³ Ānandamayī (1896–1982),¹⁴ Śivānanda (1887–1963),¹⁵ and many others, who are on their own a monument to authentic spirituality, manifested, first in the political realm, second in the philosophical order, third in the merely scatological and traditional ambit, fourth in the purely spiritual, and fifth in unadulterated bhakti. And last but not least is another who has forged a large part of contemporary Indian spirituality, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). Each of these names represent a corresponding school of spirituality, and these from very different perspectives have all been a synthesis between what is traditional and what is contemporary, which goes to demonstrate the vitality of Hinduism.¹⁶

We ought also to mention the inverse perspective, bearing in mind the influence of Hinduism on Islam and Christianity. We have already said the Sikh religion would not be understood without the mutual influence between Islam and Hinduism. Until well into the nineteenth century, the common name for Allah among a large proportion of Muslims in the Bengali population was *Īśvara*.

⁹ See *Collective Works*, edited by S. C. Chakravarti (1935).

¹⁰ See Tahmankar (1956).

¹¹ Gandhi (1986–97).

¹² See Aurobindo (1950; 1955; 1956; 1971; 1981; 1994); Merlo (1998); Satprem (1999).

¹³ See Ballesteros (1992; 1995; 1998); Ganapati Muni (1986); Osbourne (1963).

¹⁴ See Anandamayima (1982).

¹⁵ See Sivananda (1953).

¹⁶ Bibliography (apart from that which has already been indicated): Antoine (1957); Farquhar (1999); Krämer (1958, with abundance of bibliography); M. (pseudonym) (1947); Rolland (1930a; life and doctrines of Rāmākṣṇa and Vivekananda); Sarma (1946); Tagore (1980; 1988; 2002). See more recently A. Sharma (1996), and also Mall (1997).

Also from this period we have Swamī Brahmapandit Upadhyay (1861–1907),¹⁷ co-disciple of Vivekananda¹⁸ and for some time Tagore's companion, who was baptized Christian in 1891, and Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889–ca. 1929), having converted to Christianity adopted the spirituality of Hindū *saṃnyāsin*.¹⁹ The first being Catholic (although baptized by an Anglican priest) and the second Protestant, both are precursors of later attempts to adapt Christianity to Hindū spirituality. But we should leave this incursion to one side.

Given the lack of both temporal and cultural perspectives, since without a doubt, a new world is emerging, a synthetic judgment on the Hindū renaissance cannot be made. However, in very general terms it could be said that we are witnessing a positive reform in which the traditional spirit is conjugated with modern contributions. Without mentioning apologetic influences and artificial imitations, one cannot deny that modern Hindū spirituality represents a substantial step toward the encounter and understanding of religions. Without needing to speak of Christian “elements” in neo-Hinduism since religions are wholly organic and neither one nor the other allow themselves to be broken down to “atoms,” there is no doubt that a positive symbiosis is taking place in India, a country where traditionally all religions live fruitfully together in harmony (just consider Sufism, to mention another case).²⁰ To put it another way, the emulation, whether Christian or modern, is enabling Hinduism to purify itself and find itself, and in the collision with the modern Western world, to adapt itself and progress in a very parallel sense to the evolution of Christianity after the influx and predominance of the technical and scientific worlds. “Truth alone triumphs,”²¹ states the motto of the young Indian republic. This optimistic attitude and trust in truth are characteristics of present-day Hinduism, which, on the other hand, suffers, perhaps more than any other religion, the disintegrating influence of so-called modern civilization, which tends, at least in its preliminary phases, to leave religious spirit²² aside.

The Contemporary Period

To summarize in just a few pages the spiritual temperature of a fifth of humanity in this period, a time of both crisis and cross-cultural fertilization, is all but impossible. But let us attempt to do so, in four epigraphs.

*The Impact of Secularization*²³

Modern India is not the traditional one of past times. The great catalyzing element in this change is technology, which penetrates into all the nooks and crannies of the nation at an accelerating rate, in spite of passive and generally unconscious resistance of the majority of the population. The exodus to the big cities, and hence their enormous increase of inhabitants, is in itself one proof of this fact.

¹⁷ See Lipner (2001).

¹⁸ Rolland (1930a; 1930b); Vivekananda (1946).

¹⁹ See the doctoral thesis of LaVarenne (1994), as well as Animananda (1947), and more recently the studies of Lipner & Gispert-Sauch (2001).

²⁰ See, for example, Zachner (1969) or Schimmel (2002).

²¹ *Satyam eva jayate, MundU* III.1.6.

²² See Panikkar (1960/III).

²³ We refer to secularization as a desacralization of life, and not secularity as “ontology” of secular values.

The *dharma* of Hinduism is very flexible, and throughout its age-old history it has adapted to incursions and invasions from other religions, such as Islam, and from other cultures, such as the British. But the cards were already on the table; the accommodation happened freely or was forced, but it was conscious. Modern technology, on the other hand, is portrayed as a simple instrument to improve life, without any idealistic pretensions, and moreover without the consciousness of imposing a new religion or a “more developed” culture. There is need for a more profound reflection to be able to perceive that, despite superficial opinion to the contrary, technology, inseparable as it is from modern science, is neither neutral nor can it be made universal without shattering the rhythms of traditional culture—for good or for ill.²⁴ The matter is most complex.²⁵

The great factor of this modernization, which is the equivalent of accepting the cultural patterns of the West, has been the government of the Republic of India itself, which has adopted practically all of the cultural models of the West, believing them to be universal. For quite a few years, the debate to whether “modernization” is the same as “Westernization” was a constant and compulsive issue among intellectuals. Although this is not our subject, it should be put on record. The phenomenon is not just Indian, but global.²⁶

We should not overlook historical perspectives, especially when we are dealing with a multimillennia spirituality. Yet neither can we ignore the nationalist reaction of a militant Hinduism toward the end of the twentieth century. The name *hindutva* is its symbol.

The phenomenon is too recent to make an evaluation of its spirituality. There is today a proliferation of books and magazine articles on this. We shall restrict ourselves to making a couple of general observations that avoid present-day political connotations and that are not intended to offer an evaluation of the movement, but simply situate it within the general history of Hindū spirituality.²⁷

The Emergence of the Dalit

It cannot be denied that for thousands of years Hinduism as a social-religious order has neglected, not to say despised, the lower levels of society, the casteless. Subsequent to the well-intentioned, if condescending, name given by Gandhi—*Harijan* “children of God”—these social levels have preferred to call themselves *dalit*, “oppressed.” And indeed, this is a flaw in Hinduism that the government has not been able to repair since the advent of independence. It is a problem of justice that I would not hesitate to describe as the main problem of India, both religious and political.²⁸ For very complex historical reasons both the *dalit* and *adivasi* wish to free themselves from the “tutorship” of Brahmanism and resent the exploitation to which they have been victims. They have broken away from Hindū *dharma*, which sought to assimilate them.²⁹

²⁴ See Panikkar (2001/50).

²⁵ See B. N. Banerjee (1998).

²⁶ See Latouche (1989).

²⁷ For a complete description of modern India, while being very partial and idiosyncratic, see Chaudhuri (2001).

²⁸ See the section titled “Indra’s Cunning,” which sets out to present Indian spirituality as one of the few alternatives to the technocracy that is being imposed upon the world.

²⁹ Let us recall that in 2002 the *Dalit* population numbered 250 million. These days there is a never-ending stream of publications concerning the *Dalit* and a *Dalit International Newsletter* that has been published since 1995 in Waterford, CT (USA). See the encyclopedia of fourteen volumes edited by Paswan & Jaideva (2002); Wilkinson & Thomas (1972). On the subject of the doubly delicate situ-

We said at the outset that we neither seek to make apologies for Hinduism nor denigrate it. There is no religion that does not have its dark spots. *Corruptio optimi pessima* (corruption of the best is the worst), St. Jerome apparently said. On the other hand we cannot judge phenomena of the past with the categories of the present either. Although the social situation in modern India leaves much to be desired, there are voices coming from all sides that are well aware of this encrusted injustice and seek to repair it, although not always in the peaceful way Gandhi would have wished.³⁰

The Fundamentalist Reaction

History has its pace and its memory, which do not precisely coincide with those of individual people. In spite of the undeniable positive symbiosis of the meeting of Hinduism and Islam and also Christianity (although it might be called the British Empire) one cannot ignore the fact that traditional Hindū voices had to lower their tone and take refuge in popular Hinduism. This has paved the way for the great *Hindutva* rebellion.

Neither can we deny that for centuries Hinduism, as a socioreligious order, has been ignored, not to say scorned, by the dominant elite.³¹ With the true or fictitious excuse of Hinduism's tolerance and gift of harboring all things within it, the traditional religiosity of India has gravitated toward an increasingly pronounced secularization (I do not mean secularity) and as a religion it has had very little to say in the formation of modern India. It is not at all odd that, for one reason or another, whenever Hinduism has stated that it is capable of creating its own lifestyle, popular reaction has been most oppressive. This has brought in its wake extremism of all kinds and violent reactions toward other religions. Having said all this, one cannot deny that there is a belligerent side to Hindū spirituality emerging that, under the cover of political movements, wishes to modify the historical interpretation of the origins of Hinduism.³²

The name *hindutva* was coined in 1923 by the then president of the "Great Hindū Council" (*Hindū Mahāsabha*), V. D. Sarvarkar (1883–1966). These days, political parties have launched a movement to promote "re-Hinduization" in the religious and political life of the nation, identifying India with a very particular form of Hinduism.³³ This movement has allied itself with party politics and has taken a belligerent and intransigent stance that appears to contradict many of the traditional facets of Hindū *dharma*.

We cannot continue in this vein, but from the watchtower of the millennia of traditional religions, perhaps we glimpse something new on the horizon: the vital need in all religions, without exception, for a radical change in their relationship with man.³⁴ Perhaps the very word "spirituality," which substitutes for the word "religion," could take us in this direction. Neither contemporary man's spirituality nor religiosity can be a simple imitation of past religions; the Spirit makes all things new.

ation of the Christian Dalit see Wilson (1982) and Webster (1992). For a brief history of the *Dalit* see Massey (1991).

³⁰ See, by way of example, the reaction of the largest conglomeration of poor people in Asia, the "slum" of Mumbai/Bombay, known as "Dharavi." See Patel & Goga (1987).

³¹ See, for a brief sample, Kumar (1995).

³² See articles by Thapar (2000) and Witzel & Farmer (2000) dismissing as unfounded the book by Jha Rajaram (2000), which suggests that the Aryan race was the first to settle in India from ancient times, thus making Hinduism the "national" religion.

³³ See a good description in Larson (1995). There are also more references in recent books such as Shattuck (2002); Andersen & Damile (1987); and others.

³⁴ See Panikkar (1993/27; 2000/XLIII).

Faithfulness to Truth—Satyagraha

Although in writing this essay I have chosen not to dwell on the authors cited, it is near impossible—and would in a way be unforgivable—not to dedicate some time to the man who, after India's independence, was given the name "Father of the Nation," Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, universally known as Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). I will not analyze his complex, brilliant, and controversial personality, about which thousands of books have been written.³⁵ His message is still alive. I would rather talk about him here as a symbol of the vitality of "Hindū spirituality" in our modern-day age. However, the difficulty of separating his life from his ideas is almost insurmountable, as is clear from his writings, which are nearly all autobiographical.³⁶ His work and his person are one; there is no distinction between theory and practice. "My life is my message," Gandhi himself is reported to have said more than once, adding on another occasion, in total keeping with his ideas, that his writings should be cremated with his body.³⁷

What remains are his deeds, his example, his life. Gandhi was a faithful follower of his *karma-marga*.

Gandhi is an example of the inadequacy both of our categories and of the compulsion of religion to categorize and compartmentalize everything. His vision was holistic without being syncretistic. He could, in fact, be considered both Christian³⁸ and also Muslim, as well as Jainist, and of course, Hindū.³⁹ Despite this, however, his is not a schizophrenic personality. The conventional classifications, as I have said, are of no use to us, and it is in this that his intellectual importance lies. The change that Gandhi's very existence brings about in our basic attitude toward life touches the very philosophical configuration of the burning issue regarding the "meeting of religions." It is no coincidence that this radical change of attitude comes from a person immersed in another cultural world, although perhaps this is why the Gandhian intellectual revolution has been relatively little studied. It is not a question of idealizing the person, but of accepting the challenge, which might be summed up and simplified by saying that it consists in overcoming phenomenology in the study of religion. Note that I use the term "overcome" rather than "replace." Religion, in fact, is more than a phenomenon; it is a constitutive dimension of man.

Generally, the religious phenomenon is examined as such, or from the point of view of a religion's characteristic features, but due to the predominant form of modern analytical thought we tend to overlook that there is an *intrinsic* relationship between religion (religiosity) and religions. We study, in fact, the *identity* of each religion, but most of the studies concentrate on what distinguishes religions, on their *identification*. The practical advice Gandhi gave was that the Hindū should be a better Hindū, the Muslim a better Muslim, and the Christian a better Christian. And when Gandhi declared that he was against conversion

³⁵ In 1981 alone almost half a million copies of his biography in English (Gandhi [1927]) were printed.

³⁶ See Gandhi (1986–1997).

³⁷ See Manara (2006), p. 39, for this citation. Besides being one of the most recent, Manara's study is, in my opinion, also one of the most significant today. To this should also be added the excellent study by Chatterjee (2005).

³⁸ See, for example, Gandhi (1959; 1964), collections of writings by Gandhi containing his opinions on Christianity; the monographs of Minz (1970); Thekkinedath (1973); Sequeira (1987); Pushparajan (1990); and Ellsberg (1991)—although recently these words by Gandhi seem to have been somewhat forgotten—but that is the way of the world.

³⁹ See *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950).

because he regarded it as alienation, he meant that in every religious confession there is a core of *religion*, which is not to be confused with what is commonly known as the essence (specific difference) of each religion, but refers rather to that certain (existential) “religiosity” that allows and entitles each individual to define their own reflections on the meaning of their life as religion.⁴⁰ And I use the word “reflections” here because they do not have to be clear or distinct perceptions or Cartesianly formulated beliefs.⁴¹ If Gandhi considered conversion as a breakage and being a better Hindū as perfection, it is because he believed that the true identity of every religion is not limited to its specific character.⁴² It is not a question of syncretism (artificial juxtaposition), but of growth.⁴³

Gandhi disapproved of conversions (although he respected them). What he demanded, however, was the conversion of the heart to the truth; he urged each person to deepen their own *dharma* and, if necessary, integrate it. In this sense he remained true to his Hindū *dharma* and had no qualms about living it catholically.⁴⁴ Studies on Gandhi have often mentioned the philosophy of *anekantavada*.⁴⁵ Without referring to any particular philosophy, years ago I defended what I called the pluralism of truth.⁴⁶

Some critics have regarded the Jain theory of *anekantavada* as pure skepticism because it denies the possibility of making any absolute affirmation on the grounds that we are all contingent. This doctrine is related to *syat-vada*, or the theory of “perhaps” (*syat*), which could be interpreted as anti-absolutism or, more precisely, the relativity of any human statement, since human statement only has meaning if it relates to a context. This theory has sometimes been called the theory of contextualization or possibilism. Let me say again that the philosophical foundation of pluralism is the awareness of our human contingency, since, even if we believe in an absolute truth, our belief in it *depends on* our awareness of it.

We must keep to our subject, however, if we are to avoid interrupting the flow of this study.

If I had to sum up Gandhi’s spirituality I would define it as *secular spirituality*. His message stands out even more in a religious context that is caricaturized as purely ascetic and based on the renunciation of the world (though this is somewhat of a cliché).

Once Mahatma was asked how it was possible that such a *saṁnyasin* and saint as himself, a man so religious and spiritual according to the Hindū *dharma*, could meddle in the politics of the “world.” Gandhi replied that he was not a saint who meddled in politics, but a politician who aspired to holiness.⁴⁷ Or, as his famous transposition says, it is not that God (unknowable and ineffable) is Truth, but that Truth is God. And this transposition, in fact, reveals a characteristic aspect of Indic thought.

Gandhi also quotes the verse from the *Gītā* that says that renouncing the world (*saṁnyasa*) is not enough to attain perfection (*siddhi*).⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15, where he also says that each one of us should “strive after the perfection of our own faith.” Much has been written about Gandhi’s own religiosity, but it is an area that is inseparable from his life. See the articles that appeared in *ReVision* (Washington), 24, no. 1 (2001) with the title “The Contemporary Significance of Gandhi.”

⁴¹ I can find no other synonym to express what this word suggests: those “premonitions” that come from within and are less than conjectures but more than suspicions.

⁴² See *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950), p. 230, and practically the entire book.

⁴³ See Panikkar (1989/15).

⁴⁴ See “Why I Am a Hindū” in *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (1950), pp. 5ff. (text from 1927).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Chatterjee (2005), p. 80.

⁴⁶ See Panikkar (1961/4 and 1990/32), as well as many other texts.

⁴⁷ See Manara (2006), p. 161.

⁴⁸ BG III.4.

The idea of holiness in politics is not new, but his example in the contemporary world continues to be a beacon that enlightens many others in political action. His influence spreads and is effective, though at times it appears maddeningly slow to the impatient, who still dream of transforming the world into a paradise, forgetting that the "Kingdom of God" (to use the Christian expression) "does not come with observation."⁴⁹ In fact, after Gandhi and the thousands of people who have been influenced by him, we can no longer continue to justify the still existing politics of war against the enemy. The alternative that Gandhi proposed is *civil disobedience*, not only individual but also collective. No human spirituality can be disincarnate.

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Three predominant ideas stand out among many others in Gandhi's form of spirituality: *ahimsa*, *aparigraha*, and *satyagraha*.

Ahimsa corresponds exactly to innocence (*in-nocens*): that which does not harm, hurt, or exercise violence. The word implies the absence of *himsa*, violence, which according to tradition may be physical, verbal, or intentional.⁵⁰

Ahimsa does not suggest a lack of strength or courage. On the contrary, *ahimsa* belongs to *karma-yoga*, the courageous action that springs from the power of the spirit. This is why Gandhi equates *ahimsa* to love: love is the driving force of his spirituality, which manifests itself in every aspect of his life, public and private.⁵¹

Ahimsa is not a merely passive virtue—it is a specifically human characteristic that raises man above his animal nature.⁵² In the natural world, violence reigns. The *yoga* doctrine recognizes 18 classes of *himsa*, and the Jain doctrine as many as 432⁵³—even the strictest ascetic cannot avoid killing living creatures.⁵⁴ Gandhi was aware of this and raises man above the natural law. Human dignity, in fact, consists in this. *Ahimsa* is a specifically human virtue and requires courage to resist natural instincts. For this reason it can go as far as demanding the sacrifice of life. And it is manifest, in fact, in *civil disobedience*, which, being unconditional love, puts our own lives at risk, as his followers have demonstrated.⁵⁵ The secret and the criterion of nonviolence lies in the close relationship between the means and the end. Violent means can never bring about a good end. If Gandhi had not believed in Man as a being who holds *brahman* within him (*atman-brahman*), he would not have been able to demand such heroism. There is no doubt that in this case Mahatma is a more faithful follower of the Gospel than the modern world that is still referred to as Christian, which appears to accept the praxis of the "lesser evil."

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⁴⁹ Lk 17:21.

⁵⁰ The root (*had, him, etc.*) seems to mean "to wound, damage, destroy." To understand the triple distinction I have made, we should recall the threefold traditional anthropology of body, soul, and spirit.

⁵¹ "... selfless service ... has its roots in the purest *ahimsa*, i.e., Love," says Gandhi in "Young India," June 18, 1931, cited in Manara (2006), p. 171.

⁵² This again refers to the tripartite anthropology mentioned above.

⁵³ See Tähtinen (1976), of the hundreds of books that deal with this. The same author also dedicates another more general study to the subject: Tähtinen (1983).

⁵⁴ Santpar XV, 24.

⁵⁵ Gandhi (1961): "Civil disobedience is civil breach of immoral statutory enactments" (p. 3), quoting Thoreau (p. 12), the creator of the expression "civil disobedience." Further on, Gandhi adds, "All civil disobedience is a part or branch of *satyagraha*, but all *satyagraha* is not civil disobedience" (p. 69).

Aparigraha was not Gandhi's invention, but was reevaluated by him as the indispensable condition for justice and peace. Central to *yoga* spirituality, *aparigraha* is one of five abstentions or restrictions of *rajayoga*, the first of which is, in fact, *ahimsa*, while the second is *satya*, or truth (hence the word *satyagraha*), and the last is *aparigraha*—one of the great vows (*mahavratas*) of Jainism.

According to Gandhi's interpretation, *aparigraha* is the voluntary renunciation of maximum profit or, more specifically, of ambition and ownership. In short, it is the reduction of one's lifestyle to simplicity. The word itself means nonpossession or poverty, which is not to be confused with destitution.⁵⁶ *Aparigraha* does not do away with private property, but places it at the service of the community. Indeed, Gandhian *aparigraha* can be likened to evangelical poverty—also for the fact that the ideal remains very far removed from reality—as Gandhi himself acknowledged in 1926.⁵⁷

Gandhi strove to live this ideal in the *ashram* that he founded. His dream was an economy based on this simple lifestyle, which involves eliminating all that is unnecessary and is in itself a source of happiness. Thus we may recognize a "distinction," or perhaps a "passage," between "*Homo economicus*" and "*Homo gandhianus*"⁵⁸—and since this distinction regards the former as part of an "underdeveloped culture," we might say that the modern West is paid back in its own coin.

There are some today, though they are a minority, who insist that so-called development must be arrested—a term that in itself suggests a mechanical way of thinking.⁵⁹ The expression "sustainable development" itself betrays a certain type of thought. Who or what force "sustains" development?⁶⁰ The issue has been widely debated, and it appears that even Gandhi reconsidered, or at least mitigated, his condemnation of machines.⁶¹ Today, however, three quarters of a century after Gandhi's message, it is fairly clear that the only way for mankind to survive is by simplifying life (although not by literal imitation, of course, considering the diversity of the various contexts).

Many of the criticisms that have been made against him seem to have overlooked the holistic character of his thought and his secular spirituality, based on which he deals with the economic problem by treating it as a part of Man. Gandhian economics is not a science of capital or money, but of Man. So when he opposes the introduction of machines that "help" with farmwork, it is because it would rob the majority of India's rural population of their livelihood. Violence, moreover, also has a time factor, and introducing abrupt changes in society invariably produces strong repercussions.

Gandhi's alternative has not yet been put into practice, but today it is becoming increasingly clear that if it is not adopted, albeit with the necessary modifications, the current situation will lead to catastrophe.

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The word *satyagraha* was coined on September 11, 1906, a day in the real history of mankind that exceeds the importance of the events that took place on the same date in Catalonia, Chile, and the United States. On this day, in fact, over three thousand people

⁵⁶ See Rahnema (2003).

⁵⁷ See Manara (2006), p. 257.

⁵⁸ Manara (2006), pp. 229–72, makes an excellent analysis of Gandhian economics, so I will avoid being too long-winded on the subject.

⁵⁹ See Latouche (2003).

⁶⁰ See Shiva (1993).

⁶¹ See A. K. Dasgupta (1996).

gathered together in the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg and at the request of Gandhi made an oath, calling on God as their witness, to disobey a law that they considered to be unjust and degrading.⁶² It was then that Gandhi changed the name *sadgraha*, which had been suggested to him by one of his relatives, to *satyagraha*, which, being a vow, I translate as "Faithfulness to Truth," and which at the time Gandhi translated as the "Force of Truth."⁶³ Gandhi himself provides the most concise definition of this: "*satyagraha* is search for Truth; and God is Truth. *Ahimsa* or nonviolence is the light that reveals that Truth to me" ("Young India," December 26, 1924).⁶⁴

Recalling earlier decrees, Gandhi himself said, "[*Satyagraha*] is a *movement* intended to *replace* methods of *violence* and a *movement* based entirely upon *truth*."⁶⁵

And he comments, "In *satyagraha* it is never the numbers that count; it is always the quality [...] it is never the intention [...] to embarrass the wrongdoer. The appeal is never to his fear [what today we might call terrorizing]; it is, it must be, always to his heart. The *Satyagrahi's* object is to convert, not to coerce, the wrongdoer. He acts naturally and from conviction."⁶⁶

Gandhi was able to put his doctrine into practice, which he lived to the very end of his life.⁶⁷

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In conclusion, we may say that Gandhi's intellectual message forces us to reconsider the religious factor, not as an ideology, but as an essential part of human life, and that Hindū spirituality would, therefore, be the most concrete way of practicing human religiosity within a culture.

I would like to add one last comment. Gandhi was not merely an "expert" on what we commonly refer to as "religion" or "spirituality"; he simply lived his human life inspired by what we might even call religion. He repeatedly invoked the name of God, and it is said that his last words as he fell to the ground after being shot were *Hare Ram!* The term has been translated as "Oh God!" or "Blessed be God," but refers also to *Rama*, one of the most popular names of God and the name Gandhi used in many of his speeches. Deeply influenced by the so-called atheist religion of Jainism, Mahatma was all too aware that God is just a symbol. His spirituality was naked and ecumenical. I will not dwell further on his "testament," which, as we have seen, transforms the provincial, even sectarian, sense that is all too often given to "religion" and even "spirituality." Love is practice, not theory: This, we may say, was the centerpiece of his message.

⁶² See L. Fischer (1983), p. 52, for a vivid description of the events.

⁶³ See M. K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 29 (New Delhi: Government of India Publications Division—Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1968), 92.

⁶⁴ Gandhi (1961), p. 176.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁷ *Satyagraha at Work (1986–1997)*, volume 4, is dedicated entirely to this subject.

PART 3
DHARMA

We could have described the main characteristics of the *dharma* in Hinduism by following history's guiding thread, but we have chosen to deal with the two themes separately, for two reasons: first, to avoid repetition for brevity's sake, since Hinduism is a dense jungle of religions and schools of spirituality; if all the different movements were to be dealt with throughout space and time, there would be no way in so limited a space to mention that which seems to be essential in Hindū spirituality. A second reason furthermore induces us to adopt the path of speculation, in spite of its greater difficulty, and is more in accordance with the Indic spirit, which is less inclined to historic categorization and more gifted in doctrinal treatise. This allows us to give an idea of Hindū *dharma* as a whole, along with its central issues. Strictly speaking, the history of Hinduism itself displays such a crossing and mixture of currents, influences, and values, that a plain bidimensional (time and space) history is not enough to explain the phenomenon of Hinduism. For instance, yoga and Tantrism are both schools of spirituality and at the same time "forms" that enlighten other religious confessions.

Needless to say, all of our statements are based upon a wide range and number of sources, many of which, in order to be brief and straightforward, will have to be left out.

Let us recall that we are not in any way claiming to give an account of what Hinduism really is but simply describing its most salient spirituality, most often shared by the different forms of Hinduism.

THE THREE PATHS OF SPIRITUALITY: THE THREE *Mārga*

The very word *mārga*—path, road—that comes from the root-word *mrg*, or *mārg* (which really means seek, investigate, hunt, follow, yearn for, ask for, apply for, in all cases in the sense of search), suggests to us that it concerns a task to be carried out, a means to an end, a target to aim at, a road to follow, a path to discover, but not a solution to a problem, a medicine to take, or formula to adopt.

Based on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*,¹ these three paths are also usually known as *yoga*, to wit, *karma-yoga*, the discipline of “action”; *jñāna-yoga*, union through knowledge; and *bhakti-yoga*, salvation by means of love. The word *yoga* comes from the root-word *yuj* (unite, reunite, join, cf. “yoke,”² etc.), which means discipline, union, reunion, and so on, and suggests that these three methods of spirituality lead us to the desired aim for union and communion with the “Absolute.”

Hinduism’s classical triple path is intimately linked to the different accentuation that is given to each transcendental.

The three *mārga* are paths, and the path is based on the goal. The goal is salvation (liberation, realization, enlightenment, vacuity . . .). Salvation is always the final and definitive state. Nevertheless, this state may be taken as *Being*, and then the path would be that which leads to the realization of the Self. One can only reach union with the Self by *being*. Here we have the *mārga-yoga* or the path of action; one must break away from the plane of untruthfulness and appearance by means of that action that makes us truly be. Sacrifice is its fundamental category; *hope* its inner driving force.

This goal can also be considered to be *Truth*. Therefore, the path is a cognitive path. Only those who reach the Truth are saved. This Truth is obviously not a simple logical truth or mere moral veracity, but rather the transcendental Truth, which cannot be reached through a simple epistemological or even moral process, but through total realization of the ultimate and definitive Truth. This is *jñāna-mārga* or the path of wisdom. Faith, as participation of absolute knowledge, is its soul, and *gnōsis* its fundamental category.

The goal, lastly, can be considered as the Good. And so salvation is the realization of this Good. Its attainment requires absolute surrender and consecration—total devotion to this Good. Only pure, selfless love will lead us to It. Good is not as such a value but a person. This then is the *bhakti-mārga* or the path of devotion; its fundamental category is the *person* and its quintessence, *love*.

This Good has two intimately united aspects: Good in the strict sense of transcendental object of the will, and Beauty as the object of sentiment. In point of fact, they always go hand in hand. Because of this, in the end, they form one sole path. Good that is not

¹ See BG II.48–50; etc.

² From this point of view the passage from Mt 11:30—“my yoke is easy and my burden light”—acquires the connotation of “path” or “road,” more suggestive than the usual idea of obligations to fulfill.

Beautiful could not be loved. Needless to say that the meaning of Beauty in the East differs from that of the West, as differences in the artistic manifestations in both cultures makes clear.³ All the same, there is a profound connection between all paths. This circumincession is present with all transcendentals, as it is precisely this ultimate interchangeability that defines them, but in this case union is more intimate, in that their ontological relationship is also anthropological: there is no love without will and feeling at the same time. Within *bhakti-mārga* this double tendency is discovered: the *bhakti* of pure love, owing to the fact of the influence of the second path, in other words, knowledge, and the *bhakti* of beautiful love owing to the fact of the influx of the first path, that is, the path of action. The former is still transparent love, intellectual, toward a naked Good without qualities or attributes. The latter strives toward a solid, full, and sentimental love, toward such an integral and total Good that would not even allow a single atom of all that might exist to get lost along the way, nor even a vibration of corporeity. Tantrism would develop this second form of *bhakti* to its maximum.

It may be that two Upaniṣads sum up the spirit of these two paths:

"Know this (Brahman) by means of practice (yoga) of faith, devotion (bhakti) and meditation,⁴ not by works, nor by (your) progeny, your lineage (*prajaya*) nor by donation (wealth, *dhanena*). Only by renunciation (*tyāgena*) does one attain immortality."⁵

Renunciation (*tyāga*) is not considered as abandoning one good for another one that is better, but rather, it is that disposition, attitude, virtue, "that having purified our being through renunciation itself" leads us to abandon everything else because it is useless to us.⁶

This, as we shall see, is a trait common to all three paths.

The detachment that leads us to the renunciation of everything superfluous to our realization is not an automatic act: it happens spontaneously, but only after rigorous asceticism. This is what *tapas* means: heat, ardor, burning desire, and meditation, observance, austerity, effort, asceticism, penitence. . . .⁷ This common trait is described in another Upaniṣad:

"*Tapas* is the Order (*ṛtam*), the Truth (*satyam*), the Hearing of the Scriptures (*śrutam*), Silence (Peace; *śāntam*), Control [of sensual passion] (*damas*), Equanimity (*śamas*), Generosity [in giving to others; *danam*], Sacrifice (adoration, worship) (*yajnam*) . . . adoring *Brahman* as such. This is *tapas*."⁸

In other words, it is not a question of one or more highways that lead us on to our goal, sitting in a religious vehicle that drives us there. Rather it concerns footpaths that demand we follow their course. You do not travel to the human goal along an artificial path.⁹

³ See Buckhardt (1982); Coomaraswamy (1983); Dehejia (2000); P. S. Sastri (1988).

⁴ In fact, it concerns three appositions "by means of yoga of faith, love, contemplation."

⁵ *KaivU* 2.

⁶ *KaivU* 4 could be interpreted in this fashion.

⁷ See Vesci (1992).

⁸ *MahnarU* 196–98 (chapter X according to the Andhra version and VIII according to the Dravidian version), following the editions by Varenne.

⁹ Going on foot, each step is the same as the last; going by car, a sudden braking could result in tragedy. *Homo viator*; *viandante*.

Heuristic reasons advise treating the three paths differently, and a certain scholastic tendency, based on the *Gītā*, has frequently separated them; yet as the great eighteenth-century Marathi mystic, Jñānadeva, observed, in his brilliant *Gītā* known as *Jñāneśvari*, the three paths are but one.¹⁰

The Path of Action—*Karma-mārga*

Although we shall leave any doctrinal exposition of Hinduism to one side to limit ourselves to describing its *dharma*, the latter contains an implicit doctrine that cannot be ignored if one wishes to understand spirituality in action. Here we shall refrain from analyzing the notion of transmigration that perhaps from Vedic¹¹ and Upaniṣadic¹² times onward has been associated with the idea of *karma*. However, before going on to explain the spirituality of action we shall have to turn aside to give a short explanation of what is understood by *karma*.

The Nature of Karma

The actual word *karman* stems from the root word *kr* (do, realize, carry out, etc.); it means "action," or, also, result of action, result of what has been done, that which has been carried out, the crystallized action.

Now, action, from the point of view of religious mentality and especially Indian religious mentality, does not simply mean spatial movement, using up energy or phenomenal change; it means the true updating of the self. Hence only God can be the ultimate agent since only He is creator in the sense of the production of being. In other words, action means sacral action, that is to say, liturgy, in which God and man collaborate so that the (created, contingent, potential) self is continually brought up to date. Let us not forget that updating means getting closer to God, which is being increasingly transformed into being, into Self. Being becomes so much more when involved with the Self. An action that was not an ontical change would not deserve to be known as action, it would be like writing in water. Nothing remains, nothing has been carried out in such a manner that it influences reality; in reality there has been no change.

Salvation means that process by which man transforms, changes being, from deciduous, imperfect, sinner, and contingent to definitive, perfect, saintly, divinized. This process is not due to a magical act achieving this transformation at a given moment, without human participation and being totally disconnected from the rest of mortal life. This process is the true action of life and that which we must go on doing throughout our earthly journey to forge our true self, to acquire our definitive "form." Now, man alone is unable to save himself, to realize himself. Yet the hypothesized "self-made man" is just a "modern" concept. Any human action that is truly action (that is to say, it modifies our being), that brings us closer to or further away from God, that makes us richer or poorer, is a cosmotheandric action, in other words, a liturgical one. And we say cosmotheandric because our being is also corporal

¹⁰ The spelling of this important yet little known author's name is somewhat chaotic. There is a short work of Jñānadeva's available in Spanish (Gñāneśhvar [1944]). See also Bahirat (1993); Deshpande (1988); Machado (1958); Yardi (1995).

¹¹ See *RV* X.16.3.1.164.1ff.; *SB* 1.5.3.4; X.3.3.8, although these texts are far from being clear in this sense. Specialists do not agree on its interpretation.

¹² See *BU* III.2.13; IV.3.37; IV.4.1–5; *CU* V.10.7; *KausU* 1.2; *KathU* 1.1.5–6; etc. But also the interpretation here should be carefully revised not to read in these texts earlier beliefs.

and in all our action the entire cosmos is involved. *Karman* is action and not only human action—even where man is its immediate agent. All those actions that are truly actions, that is, having such a repercussion on our being, bringing us closer to or further away from salvation, are those that form *karma*. *Karman* is the ontological load of action, so to speak; it is that action that is truly action, which means it acts and activates something. For instance, a positive or negative moral action modifies our *karman* because it makes our being richer or poorer, because at root it is not only a simple human action, but also a cosmotheandric action, liturgical. Needless to say that here “liturgical” does not mean ceremony and even less ritualism, but that *ergon*, that energy, produced by *laos* (λαός), by (conscious) creation that enables it to reach its destination.¹³

Hence the connection between *karman* and sacrifice. Man, as with the cosmos, according to Vedic spirituality, is still incomplete.¹⁴ God’s creation is a sacrifice,¹⁵ and only through sacrifice do we return to our Origin, or better said, doing things, not to be worthy of God, but being God itself; that is, it ontologically goes back to its point of departure.¹⁶ Sacrifice is the action of sacral doing, that is, to simply act, that the being has to do what still has not been done, what is disjointed, dismembered in a thousand pieces to be reconstituted, regenerated, saved.¹⁷ The human persona becomes integrated (*samskṛta*) in actions (*karma*, ritual acts) that are manifested throughout liturgical ceremony.¹⁸ The *ātman*, or divine principle of life in Hindū spirituality, is not something that is realized once and for all, but rather is “created,” brought to light during sacrifice.¹⁹ Because of this, sacrifice rendered to the *ātman* is superior to sacrifice to the Gods (which would be to obtain some kind of perishable good), as this alone produces immortality, making us cast off this “body of death”²⁰ as a snake sheds its skin.²¹

However, during pre-Upanishadic times, any action was sacral and hence was directly linked to sacrifice, and so bearing fruit for eternal life. The gradual secularization of culture, while taking the form of interiorization, disconnected common daily actions from liturgical action, yet such daily actions did not totally lose their karmic content. *Karman* became substance; it became independent from the very being of man, yet continued being the ontological charge of action. It ceased to be the actual self or being of human beings, that which they have as their cosmotheandric core, which goes on growing and becoming aware until it reaches its fullness of being, to be transformed into that dimension of human beings that stores within it the said ontic growth in man, and, in general, of all creatures. If “Christ is all in all,”²² Hinduism affirms that man is all in all, the *puruṣa*.

To explain the notion of *karman* in its most genuine aspect, in a plausible manner (since it is well known that, as with any living concept in constant use, the concept of *karman* has evolved and has come to symbolize, in a certain popular way of thinking, a simple manifestation of worthiness); we can liken it to the concept of historicity in contemporary Western philosophy.

¹³ See Panikkar (1970/XI).

¹⁴ On the subject of this problematic issue, see the first three chapters of Silburn (1989).

¹⁵ See *SatB* XIII.7.1; *BU* I.1.1; *Manu* 1.22; etc.

¹⁶ See the hymn to Puruṣa (*RV* X.90) and other texts in Panikkar (2001/XXV), pp. 77–108.

¹⁷ See all the theology on Prajāpati, who was created in his dismembering, and the meaning of the reconstitution of his body. See Panikkar (2000/XXVII).

¹⁸ See *KausB* III.8.

¹⁹ See *SB* XI, 1.8.3–6.

²⁰ See Rom 7:24; 1 Cor 15: 44, and also Buddhist and Platonic meditations on expiration and death.

²¹ See *SatB* XI.2.6.13–14.

²² Col 3:11.

Indeed, to say that man is a historical being means that his self is not a monad without windows nor an atom without ontological elasticity over time and space, nor without inner and outer links constitutive of his being. The historical dimension of humanity is what explains to us its identity alongside its diversity throughout its temporal endeavor. What is more, the human community, which makes humanity one, without eliminating its multiplicity and its own personality, is also based on this historical dimension of man. The "original sin," and any collective sin, spiritual inheritance, and even mere biological heredity—the communal destiny of a country, family, or any natural human group—is likewise all based on this human characteristic: historicity, with which storing the past is enabled, so to speak, making the latter emerge in the present and sustaining an intrinsic link with our own nature that unites us to the rest of mankind and the rest of creation. Man's last act can be enough to save or condemn him, because it is not the last link in a mere material chain, but rather the condenser that carries all the ontic weight of his existence—each link containing the previous one, if "what is contained" is not materialistically but rather historically interpreted. The fate and salvation of all mankind is a unique adventure owing to this very ontic tie that unites us all. Vicarious satisfaction, redemption, and, in a word, religion presupposes this ontological religation between and among people, with the cosmos and with God—as the symbol of this mystery. To clarify this set of problems, the *karman* of Hindū spirituality seeks to provide an answer.²³

Human beings indeed possess a karmic nature, and it is by virtue of this *karman* that they are saved or perish, and are bound up with others (although, in general, the karmic chain has few horizontal connections; these come and go unnoticed: "The shortest path between men goes through the stars").

Karman is the constitutive feature of creatureliness.²⁴ While a being still possesses *karman*, it cannot be saved; the total extinction of *karman* represents the elimination of all creaturability and hence man's salvation. When in primal Vedic times, as we have already indicated, sacrifice retained in the consciousness of man all its strength and efficiency, salvation realized through sacrifice was complete. When, with the interiorization of sacrifice, the latter gained in purity but lost in strength, it seemed that a simple human existence was not capable of eliminating all *karman*, which would have to forcibly reappear in another karmic subject to continue its purification. This would be the source of the common idea of transmigration, which becomes necessary when a life has not sublimated all its *karman*. That which transmigrates is not accordingly the actual individual soul (platonic dogma rather than Christian) but rather the susceptible package of merit and demerit, this ontological wave that carries on vibrating in another body until all the potential energy that remains is drained. Thus, the famous saying, "The Lord is the only transmigrant."²⁵

Here we must also insert an important observation in order to comprehend other cultures, as we have already pointed out on other occasions: the context is essential to be able to understand any text. For instance, modern Western individualism is compensated by a historical sense of participation in common "progress." In turn, karmatic solidarity is understood within the individualistic framework of solitary salvation, whose most outstanding example, apart from Jain spirituality, is the *kaivalya* of the *sāṃkhya* and of yoga, although with its roots in the Upaniṣad. Salvation consists in the "unhitching" from all links, both those of the body and of all other things along with the entire world.²⁶ It is the *kaivalya*

²³ See Panikkar (1971/72; revised in 2000/XXVII), pp. 353–78.

²⁴ See BG VIII.3. A difficult and profound text that has had more than one interpretation.

²⁵ See Śaṅkara, *BSB I.1.5*.

²⁶ Central theme of the *KaivU*.

in yoga.²⁷ In a word, when speaking of Western individualism and Hindū corporatism, one must frame these characteristics as complementary elements of opposite extremes.

Be that as it may, the law of *karman* represents the law of universal causality at its ultimate ontological level—although the notion of cause (*hetu*) may be polysemic.²⁸ It is obviously not a merely quantitative law. Every act has its effect, however—an effect that does not simply remain on the phenomenal level, but rather bites into the very being of things, which as such they add to or subtract from that ontological historicity which is known as *karma* in India. Thus, all morality is nothing other than the explication of the universal law of *karma*. Which are the acts that man should realize to attain his end? What does the karmic content in an act consist of? These and other similar questions are posed by and inherent in karmic morality in India. To describe the law of *karman* in detail is the equivalent of describing all Hindū ethics.²⁹ We shall limit ourselves to giving just a couple of general considerations.

Pravṛtti and Nivṛtti

(The Path of Action and the Path of Renouncing Action)

There are two great directions that are detectable from the beginning of Indian spirituality that have left a deep mark on Hindū culture.³⁰ Perhaps in no other culture than the Hindū have both directions manifested with such strength and thrust. We could say action and reaction. A large proportion of the immense wealth and variety in the spirituality of India could be said to stem from this double spiritual direction in Hinduism. And perhaps the power and strength of one direction is the cause of no lesser potency in the other. Indeed, no other religion is so absolute, negative, transcendent, and without compromise with this world and with creation as Hinduism. The modern accusation that Hinduism is a negative religion, denying the world and its values,³¹ which has been impressed upon a great section of neo-Hinduism to such an extent,³² has in its favor countless texts and examples. What is wrong with such an interpretation, apart from the fact of it being presented as an accusation, is its one-sidedness. No other religion apart from Hinduism, on the other hand, portrays a more earthly, positive, and affirmative picture of all creation, none a more baroque, not to say orgiastic and immanent, portrayal. This double polarity permeates the whole of Indic spirituality and its different schools and systems. There is a yoga of one type and the other. There is a Tantrism of one type and the other, and so on—or, more exactly, one or another dimension, in a more or less accomplished synthesis, belong to the nature of Hinduism. We shall see some examples of this later on. At this point we shall confine ourselves to describing this double attitude and what seems to us to be their ultimate foundation.

²⁷ YS III.50 presents the translations, all legitimate, that have been given for the term *kaivalya* as a "curiosum": "Für-sich-sein" and "Blossheit" (Hauer), "Absolutheit" (Deussen), "Völlige Freiheit" (Bäumer), "In-dependence of intelligence" (Venkatesananda), "Aloneness" (Radhakrishnan), "Absolute-ness" (Bangali Baba), "Isolation" (Woods), "Suprema soledad" (Herrera), "Suprême liberté" (Mazet), "Libertad total" and "Libertad" (Desikachar, in Spanish translation), and so on.

²⁸ See Glossary.

²⁹ See S. Dasgupta (1994).

³⁰ See Dubant (2003), who relates this "path" to the *Vedānta*, Buddhism, and Zen.

³¹ See Schweitzer (1987).

³² See Radhakrishnan (1960), etc.

Pravṛtti is the path of efficient and positive action; it is the path of good works.³³ Good actions are those that can save us. Everyone should do their duty, and this means carrying out those actions prescribed for a specific person, depending on their place in the cosmos and society. The presumption of this attitude is that all action preserves a link with what is transcendent and thus exercises causality over it. Action is salvific because it is linked to sacrifice. When this consciousness disappears, pure activism comes onto the scene. We repeat that this, as with so many other notions, is interpreted in different ways in different schools of philosophy and spirituality.

In contrast, *nivṛtti* is the negation of all activity because of having recognized the eminently transcendent character of salvation and the inadequacy of any human means to gain it.³⁴ Not only good deeds, but also the reason behind action, belong to the worldly sphere, and hence it is vain to claim to reach the Infinite by finite means. The only path to salvation is through absolute renunciation, including renunciation of action. In fact, not only is man incapable of conquering his own salvation, but this whole idea lacks meaning. Salvation is not conquered because in its most absolute meaning it cannot be conquered.³⁵

That which is not, does not succeed [cannot succeed] in being;

That which is, does not succeed [cannot succeed] in being that which is not.³⁶

That which would be conquered would not be true salvation. *Brahman* does not become, the Self is not made, that which is to be has to come into being, is not the Self and, thus, cannot be the ultimate and definitive end. The only path to salvation is through absolute renunciation, including the illusion of believing there is a path. The only thing man must do is this renunciation, that is, eliminate every obstacle that prevents the appearance and glory of what is already there, simply because it *is*. Any activity presupposes a desire that in turn is based on a lacuna, on an imperfection, on an implicit recognition that, in fact, salvation does not exist, since it is wanted. The only escape is the path of nothingness, not as a path to follow, but rather as a reality to discover, an experience to become aware of. The latter would be the most extreme interpretation of a certain Vedantic monism, but the pole of *pravṛtti* cannot be forgotten or eclipsed. When all is said and done, a large section of Hindu spirituality moves within this not always resolved dilemma—although the a-dual

³³ See Glossary. Literally this could be translated as “evolution.” A study that compared it with the notion of *epektasis* in the patristics of Greece, especially in Gregory of Nyssa, would be productive. See the enlightening chapter by Daniélou (1944). We adduce this sample as an indication of possible intercultural studies (yet to be done) examining the convergence and divergence of the diverse lines of force that have contributed to the different visions of the world. It is significant that in the dominant monoculture, after Darwin, the biological hypothesis of evolution has monopolized the evolutionary vision of the universe to the extent that it has.

³⁴ See Glossary. Literally could be translated as “involution.” A worthwhile study would be another comparative one between this approach and the study on quietism by Miguel de Molinos, for instance. See Molinos (1976) and the introductory essays, as well as Valente (1974), Tellechea (1976), and Toscano (1998). We offer these details to alleviate the lack of knowledge and abandonment (on a par with misunderstanding) of this Aragonese author condemned by the Inquisition to life imprisonment in 1687.

³⁵ Another comparison with the Pauline thought of the Epistle of Romans would nonetheless be interesting for Hinduism and important for Christianity, and above all for the Protestant doctrine of the “*sola gratia*.”

³⁶ BG II.16. Some have seen in this text a parallel with ideas of Parmenides (Martin [2002] and others), but the translation is ambiguous (as Zachner [1969] points out in his translation and commentaries).

advaita represents the spiritual effort to overcome this issue. Tantric spirituality brings into line these two abstract principles in *Śiva* and *śakti*. The former would be the static aspect, of quietness and non-action; the latter would represent dynamism, activity, and energy. But neither of them can be separated from the other. It is important to observe how these great themes belong to the human restlessness for unraveling the mystery of existence—although later they might appear in more or less extreme and elaborate forms.

Nevertheless, both approaches, that is, those that incline either toward *pravṛtti* or *nivṛtti*, recognize the law of *karma*. The former takes it that to eliminate *karman* one must undertake action that the actual law of *karma* prescribes. The latter takes it that the only way to eliminate the burden of contingency and creaturability is to allow them to vanish, like smoke, to not prevent the veil of *māyā* from falling from us, like scales from our eyes, allowing us to cease from being concerned with that which is untrue and from clinging onto that which is not.

The Origin of the Law of Karman

There have been many disputes over the origin of this theory, which undoubtedly forms one of the pillars, if not to say the backbone, not only of Hinduism but of most Oriental religions.

From the *historical point of view*, scholars have wanted to see an influence from pre-Aryan culture and religion, but this is no more than conjecture. It has also been thought that it was a simple transposition of the “primitive” mentality of the cycles of nature applied to man, but this, too, is hardly a satisfactory explanation. In fact, the difficulty presented by tracing its historical origin does not solely stem from the lack of information, but in the very nature, mysterious as it is, of *karma* itself, which represents an invariant in the religious life of Man on Earth. It is not a waste of time searching for the origins of the *law of karma*, just as it is not incongruent to investigate the source of a specific *conception* of God. But one must not forget that both *that* which *karma* seeks to express and *divine reality* strictly speaking do not have historic origins because they have no foundation in the evolution of human thought, but rather in reality itself, although grasped by man at different levels of intensity. They are discoveries rather than inventions or philosophic hypotheses.

From the *theoretical point of view*, the origin of the law of *karman* perhaps could be explained by the confluence in a single notion of a triple train of thought: to wit, the physical, psychological, and religious. On one hand, we encounter the physical law of *causality*, which Man cannot escape. This world is not chaotic, but rather cosmic, and consequently ruled by an order that finds a more or less adequate expression in the law of causality. Human inequality—the differences between beings, the very human basis upon which the human exercise of freedom is sustained—requires a coherent physical and metaphysical cause that can justify it. This cause would be *karman*, then, understood as a metaphysical power that is able to explain these and other facts.

On the other hand, a number of psychological reasons argue for the recognition of an ultimate agent of explanation. So, for instance, the consciousness of *morality* appears to require that the injustices of this world in the human order—not to mention creation as a whole—should have some kind of justification, and this is provided by the law of *karma*. The reward and punishment called for by whatever free action are here not strictly speaking that at all (a weak point, this, in certain monotheistic mentalities). Rather they are the positive or negative results of the fulfillment or otherwise of karmatic dynamism itself. In general, all moral order requires a certain metaphysical constancy that is embodied, so to speak, in the nature and existence of *karma*.

Third, the strictly religious, or if one prefers liturgical, sense requires that man's salvation is neither a divine caprice disconnected from any kind of human collaboration, nor a simple human action that as such is unable to reach the order of Divinity. The consistency of sacrificial action that is manifested in worship is *karman* par excellence. And, indeed, the latter is the meaning of the concept in many texts, including the *Gītā*.

The confluence of these three factors in one sole notion seems to us to be the origin of the law of *karman*, of its greatness and truth, along with its weaknesses and constraints.

Taking into account what has been said up until now, it appears to us that one can understand the karmatic theory of Yājñavalkya, who, it seems, endowed it with its present formulation, and moreover understand the sometimes esoteric character of *karman*,³⁷ its unique importance, its direct connection with the works undertaken by man,³⁸ as well as understanding that the decisive factor for our otherworldly destination and our reappearance on the Earth³⁹ is none other than *karman*,⁴⁰ and so on.

From the *phenomenological point of view* the idea of *karman* has been seen as one more example of the theory of power, as the most primal and universal representation of the religious experience (God, Absolute, Transcendence, etc.). The Supreme Being, according to this theory, would be apprehended above all as a power, and a strength that would be substantialized, functionalized, personalized, not to say volatilized, depending on the case. Without entering into a general analysis of religion, and without denying that in the second instance, *karman* could be "power, law, and treasure all at the same time,"⁴¹ it does seem nonetheless that the origin of the law of *karman* in India cannot be sufficiently explained as a mere hypostasis of (divine) Power in a spiritual condition that we know, precisely, as *karma*. However, this does not mean that this phenomenological explanation does not express a very real aspect of the issue.

From the *practical point of view* one should seek the origin of the law of *karman* in the human tendency for rationalization. Humanity searches for a "reason" (*ratio*) to explain how its own existence and the law of life function in a concrete fashion. All of this is to be found in *karman*. It would indeed provide a reason for the great queries in life: human, not to mention cosmic, inequalities would be explained by this very law; worthiness and unworthiness are condensed within *karman*; salvation can be achieved when the self has purified its *karman*; the order of the cosmos is ruled by this very law; and human liberty itself is conditioned by a multitude of heterogeneous factors. All this would find its explanation in the greater or lesser karmatic load of all beings. Discovering and then following the law of *karman* is man's concrete mission on Earth. There are few things that truthfully can be more rightly said than if it, *karman*, did not exist, it would have to be invented. Nonetheless, it is a different story to decipher what the true nature of this *karman* really is. At this stage its description is sufficient.

The Law of Disinterested Action—Naiṣkarmya

One of the original elements in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which in this along with other fields achieves a rarely equaled synthesis, consisting in harmonizing (but not destroying) the alluded tension between action and contemplation, between *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*, between temporal

³⁷ See BU III.2.13.

³⁸ "As one does, as one acts, so one becomes" (BU IV.4.5).

³⁹ CUV.10.7.

⁴⁰ SUV.7.

⁴¹ Leeuw (1986), p. 18, from the 1956 edition.

activity and the intemporal a-cosmism. The whole of the second and third books of the *Gītā*, and part of the fourth, deal with the issue thematically. The core of this doctrine is obviously Vedic, and even in the Upaniṣads, direct references are encountered on the doctrine of the *Gītā*.⁴²

Inactivity does not secure liberation from action, nor will renunciation of action, for this very fact, lead to perfection.⁴³ What is more, it is not even psychically possible.⁴⁴ What happens is that action only has any value when it is carried out as sacrifice, in the sense we have earlier indicated.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the demands of whoever criticizes simple action cut off from its roots would seem clear. And so, we cannot hope for it to lead us to salvation.⁴⁶ In reality, one does not have to undertake action to gain salvation.⁴⁷ Activity must be carried out to maintain the world⁴⁸ following the very example of God, who, without being tied to action, undertakes it to maintain the world.⁴⁹ This experience of the *lokasamgraha* is that which endows consistence and cosmic consciousness to a large part of *dharma*—*loka-samgraha*. A positive karmic action cooperates with the maintenance of the universe.⁵⁰ Action then finds its full justification in the divine imitation and in its example complies with the supreme moral law that consists in realizing action without hunger for its fruit, with the renunciation of its consequences and with the divine lordship that by realizing positive action to help in the maintenance of the world, is not tied by it, or dependent on it.⁵¹ In the same way, man must fulfill his duty and transcend all selfishness or self-seeking in claiming immediate payment for the good deed undertaken.⁵²

The *naiṣkarmya siddhi*, or the perfection of disinterested activity (non-egocentric), does not mean renunciation of action, but rather the renunciation in (detachment from) the action, namely, free and spontaneous action that is not in search of personal merit nor for its fruit or its result. Because of this one must overcome all desire caused by an object and let oneself be guided, not by one's senses (*indriyāni*), or one's mind (*manas*), nor by one's intellect (*buddhi*); one needs to have overcome the three *guna* (*nistraigunya*), that is to say, harbor pure energy, having reached *nirvāṇa* (of all opposite pairs, including good and bad)—the state of *dvandvātīta* (way beyond all duality).⁵³

The basis for this attitude is found in the underlying anthropology. The text from the *Gītā* we have commented upon reads as follows:

They say that the senses (*indriyāni*) [the sentient world, the body] are superior to dull matter; but the mind (*manas*) is higher than the senses; the intellect (*buddhi*) is higher than the mind; and he [the soul] is higher than the intellect.⁵⁴

⁴² See esp. *IsU* 2. All the *karma-yoga* is condensed in this verse: *na karman lipyate* (May action not touch [stain, influence, cling to, quench] you)—from the root word *leip* (to stick, adhere).

⁴³ *BG* III.4.

⁴⁴ *BG* III.5–6.

⁴⁵ *BG* III.9; IV.23.

⁴⁶ *BG* III.31.

⁴⁷ *BG* III.17; III.30.

⁴⁸ *BG* III.20.

⁴⁹ *BG* III.22–25.

⁵⁰ See Glossary. See *MhBh* XII.251.25. It is significant that more than one translation into Spanish glosses over the cosmic sense of the text.

⁵¹ *BG* IV.13–14.

⁵² *BG* II.47; III.19; IV.18–22; VI.1.

⁵³ We present these simple Sanskrit expressions to provide a sample of up-to-date notions in Hindū spirituality and facilitate a more detailed study of Hindū dharma. See Joshi (2002).

⁵⁴ *BG* III.42.

Commentators say that the “he” in this quote is the *ātman* and the text is an echo of an Upaniṣad that continues the gradation: senses, mind, intellect that are followed by the great *ātman*, the unmanifested (*anyakṛta*), and the spirit (*puruṣa*). Beyond the *puruṣa* there is nothing.⁵⁵ What spurs man (into action) is not desire, not the movement of his mind, but rather a simultaneous, immanent, and transcendent superior force. That is why pure action is not an intellectual deduction, which provides the reasons for our acts, but, rather, pure contemplation; and so to put reason as a guide impels toward the triumph of the strongest or most intelligent. To deny reason’s power of veto is something quite different.

After the impact of the *Gītā* on Hindū (and here we are talking about the fifth century before Christ), any other moral that emphasized a reward-and-punishment aspect as being primordial would seem impure. The action that saves in the *Gītā* is based on wisdom, realized as a sacrifice and with total disinterest.⁵⁶ This action is a true cosmotheandric activity: Man gives his acts as an offering to God, but it is God who accepts them, and at bottom, God, along with the world and man, who realizes them.⁵⁷

The quoted texts are enough to dismiss the equating of this morality and the Kantian one that quite often observers have wished to see. Kant and the *Gītā* certainly criticize the utilitarianism, even where it is clothed in spiritual motives, but whereas Kant seeks to found ethics upon itself by virtue of the autonomy pertaining to moral law, the Hindū foundation is not one of pure autonomy, rather it is *ontonomical*⁵⁸ (let us call it); that is, it is not disconnected either from God or from the ontological aim of man. It is an eminently religious morality; better said, it intimately connects morality with religion once more. This disinterested action, full of sobriety, of inner peace and freedom is precisely “yoga” that binds (“yokes”) us to our true destiny.⁵⁹

The spirituality of disinterested action is not a simple abjuring of reward or the merit of our good deeds; it, before anything, consists of liberation from our intentions and, above all, from our actions themselves. It is not simple scorn for the result and stoic imperturbability that the *Gītā* preaches, but rather, dominion over action and the awareness of the impotence of action on its own to attain man’s liberation.⁶⁰ In Christian terms we could say that what the *Gītā* really means is that we are useless servants, in spite of having done what we were supposed to have done,⁶¹ and man is not saved for his deeds,⁶² although a superior activity flows from a true spiritual person, because faith without works is dead.⁶³ When the left hand knows what the right hand is doing, the action is useless;⁶⁴ when we do or fail to do actions for having seen Christ in our neighbor, the action has no value at all.⁶⁵

Spirituality in the *Gītā* is situated at the midpoint between non-action, the Taoist *wu wei* that trusts in “wise,” ordered nature, and interventionism in the daily round. Perhaps it could be said that there is no causality, but only concatenation. The “detachment” of a Meister Eckhart, or a John of the Cross, would be close to what we are seeking to express.

⁵⁵ See *KathU* I.3.10–11 and II.7–10.

⁵⁶ *KathU* IV.23; V.10.

⁵⁷ *KathU* IV.24; V.8.

⁵⁸ See Glossary.

⁵⁹ *BG* II.48–50; IV.4.

⁶⁰ See the wonderful description of the beloved of the Lord in *BG* XII.13–20.

⁶¹ *Lk* 17:10.

⁶² *Gal* 2:16; *Ep* 2:9; *Rom* 3:20; etc.

⁶³ *Sant* II.20.

⁶⁴ *Mt* 6:3.

⁶⁵ *Mt* 25:37–45.

What counts is the intention, the movement of one's heart—something that in one way or another has been stated in practically all religious traditions.

In Hinduism is a path to salvation, yet it must be an ontic activity, that is to say, that it impinges on the very being of man and springs from his source. This is religious activity and not just moral, although there is no need to counterpoise them. From this perspective a certain abandon in karmic spirituality is explained, which is subsumed under the other two paths we will be mentioning: the true activity of man is knowledge, the second path would say. That true action that leads us to drink from the very spring of the Being and thus participate in It and receive its very Being is devotion, love, the third path would say. But we repeat, the three paths are not separate paths, since every traveler should carry in their knapsack supplies from the other paths.

In summary: man cannot stop performing acts; they form part of his nature. Consequently, it is not through non-action or renunciation of action that one can attain one's end, one's perfection.⁶⁶ What, then, can one do? Not be dependent on the fruit of action; banish all utilitarianism.⁶⁷ Action has its very own value and this not because of its outcome—hence, the need for the indispensable purity of heart for any true action. All this is not at all easy to experience for those who live immersed in a civilization replete with instruments and tools, which are practically all means to achieve immediate ends or complicated (generally costly) artificial means to satisfy one's vital necessities—such as eating (which apparently requires multinational food suppliers), sleeping, and dressing (which involve us in unbridled spending); “A frugal life and deep thought” is still the slogan of many authentic Brahmins—without entering now into other sociological considerations.

But there is more; one should purify one's heart in such a way that action is seen in non-action, that one has the discernment to experience that the maximum activity is contemplative.⁶⁸

Ethical Karman

Hinduism is before all else a religion, and it cannot be reduced to just simple ethics. On top of this, the superiority and independence of religious value over ethical value have led to a certain disconnection between religion and ethics within some sects and manifestations of Hinduism—as has happened in other traditions. Here we shall not delve into the interpretation of Kṛṣṇa's morality or immorality when giving advice to Arjuna to help him overcome his moral qualms and let him fight in the battle described in the *Mahābhārata*.⁶⁹ Only two observations are of any worth. The general consciousness of man at this space in time, practically up until the present, did not condemn war, only unjust ones, and the *kṣatrya*'s duty, his *svadharma*, was that of a noble lord in defense of justice. Second, wars, although always cruel, were human; that is, it was people who fought and not machines, very different from the current situation. *Karman* and *dharma* have a strict relationship, but they are not the same.

Samrambha-yoga—or the path to God through hostility, or even in a sense hate, toward the Supreme Being—provides us with an extreme example of this concept.⁷⁰ Ultimately, this is not indifference, but rather a sort of rebellion against God, something in the fashion

⁶⁶ BG III.4.

⁶⁷ BG IV.20.

⁶⁸ BG IV.18–19.

⁶⁹ The long introductions in the translations of the *Gītā* that we have indicated can be consulted for these purposes.

⁷⁰ See, particularly *BhagP* III.16.30 and a later classical text, the *Rajasuya Prabandam* by Narayāṇa Bhaṭṭatīri.

of Jacob's striving with the angelic epiphany of the Divinity.⁷¹ The phenomenon and interpretation are different, but a certain deep parallelism can be discerned. A certain branch of contemporary Judaism is scandalized because of God abandoning His people, and go as far as to blaspheme against Him, yet they cannot deny God's existence or doubt God's power; it is a love-hate relationship. Compare a certain Islamic theology concerning Iblis: Satan (whom al-Hallaj calls the purest of monotheists) continues to love God at the same time as hating God, tempts man, and thus seeks to make God's creation fail.⁷²

Another complex problem, not to be dealt with here, is the concept of God over and above good and bad. Nevertheless, this idea does not mean simply that ethics have no place in religion either. It is true that this has led to amoral, not to say sometimes immoral, religion, but in the end the divine axiological transcendence that this concept defends, on the one hand, solely wishes to overcome dualism (good and bad not being at the same level), and on the other, underlines the ontologically religious character of salvation.

Certain Indologists (this now obsolete term seems right here) have wished to view this concept of God being above good and bad as Hindū "*galimatias*" since they see it as an internal contradiction. Apart from the fact that the God of Jesus Christ does not seem to discriminate between good and bad *a priori*,⁷³ since "he makes his sun to rise and the rain to fall on the evil and on the good,"⁷⁴ we need to make a logical observation as well as a philosophical one. There may be many discussions on what it means to be above good and evil, but if it is admitted as a hypothesis, even if it is just to rectify it, we cannot say that it is an "evil" that God is above evil.

The notion that God is above good and evil, apart from being common in all apophatic philosophy, is perhaps one of the clearest statements affirming that the Divine Mystery transcends all categories.

Be that as it may, *karman* in classical Hinduism is a strictly religious category, much more than a moral concept. It is rather in the "modern" evolution of Hinduism that a purely ethical concept of *karma* is encountered, where it is understood as the moral law that governs human behavior and whose fulfillment leads to salvation (liberation). At bottom, what we have here is a certain secularization of religion and in many of its modern adherents we note the impact of Western culture's evolution—something not on the whole necessarily negative, but to be taken into account.

Thus, the law of *karman* is identified with *dharma*, the latter, in turn, as moral duty. And so religion is boiled down to morality. *Satya* (truth) taken to be sincerity and *ahimsā* (non-violence) taken to be compassion (akin to the Buddhist *karuṇā* although Rāmānuja expounds this concept, applying it by the way to God) would be two of its basic categories here.

The fact that the traditional concept of *karma* includes ethical behavior and moral law is unquestionable, but it cannot be whittled down to a mere category of human behavior. In the first place, *karman* belongs to the religious-metaphysical order. Here we have another characteristic of Hindū *karman*, related to *svadharma* or personal duty (of an individual or caste).⁷⁵ Every being has their own *karman* that not only explains their past but also conditions their present and future action. This means that what is amoral and immoral for some is not necessarily so for others. The case of Arjuna in

⁷¹ Gn 32:25–33.

⁷² See the magnificent summary by Bausani (1983) of Islamic mystics' vision of Satan and also Nurbahsh (1986).

⁷³ See Mt 13:25–30 and 1 Cor 4:5.

⁷⁴ See Mt 5:45.

⁷⁵ See BG II.31.33; III.35; XVIII.47; etc.

the *Gītā* is paradigmatic. A wrongheaded interpretation of this may lead to anarchy and libertarianism. A more traditional approach could lean more toward the classical tolerance in Hinduism, along with the danger of indifference toward injustice. Another interpretation with a Christian slant takes it as an explanation for the taxing evangelic message that we should not judge—encouraging us not to make moral judgments.⁷⁶ Our heart must be very pure for our mind not to judge—which does not mean, note, that we would be lacking in discernment.

And here it would be appropriate to bring up a common criticism often made by external observers—which does not mean to say that in many cases it should not be justified. The law of *karman* has sometimes been presented as an excuse for immoral behavior (“it’s my *karman*”) or denial of human freedom (“I can’t do anything about it”).

Both dangers are real, but they do not capture the true nature of *karman*. *Karman* certainly does condition us, as an inheritance may, for instance, but it does not determine what we are. *Karman* is certainly attached to us, just as a string is tied to a balloon or ballast in a ship that keeps it balanced and able to steer. It is certainly the brace of our creaturability. Man can transform his own *karman* just as a sculptor molds his raw material. This conditioning renders us more human since it makes us more conscious of our lifelong relationship with the cosmos and our own contingency. *Karman*, as we have repeatedly mentioned, is the expression of our universal solidarity.

Spirituality of Action

Human action, or more to the point, the works that human beings accomplish, are a path toward salvation in Hinduism. Man arrives at his destiny clambering up, so to speak, the works carried out on Earth.

Thus we repeat that it would be unfair to say that Hinduism is a religion that does not recognize the value of temporal and material things, nor does not take into account a human being’s social duty. In general, for far too long, the West has only had three points of contact with Hindū *dharma*: a certain idealized idea of the *Vedānta*, the sexual side of *Tantra*, and an idea of popular religiosity bordering on magic. Fortunately this view is changing, and many commonplaces are being dispelled. By contrast, something less fortunate is that, in general, India herself still has the stereotypical image of a mechanical and material West, thus ignoring other aspects of the extremely wide spectrum of Western culture. Nevertheless, it is true that Hindū *dharma* has been relatively unconcerned with the issue of social justice while Christian morality has wished to serve two lords: God and Mammon.

However that may be, what we still have to go over is the way in which Hinduism sees the collaboration of good works in human salvation. The true spirituality of action does not consist in accumulating the fruit of good deeds to gain entry into heaven. This heaven (*svarga*), in fact, has never been considered by Hinduism as the *ultimate* end for man. In reality, renouncing the fruit of action is one of the conditions for gaining the possible and indisputable merit arising from good actions. Man is saved *by* his works and *by means of* good actions, but leaving them behind is how he is actually freed. It is by perforating, so to speak, the karmic crust that the profundity of that which is real is penetrated; it is by disregarding the worldly that enables the attaining of the heavenly, as a specific Christian spirituality has preached—although that was to counteract the opposite tendency.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See Mt 7:1 and 6:37.

⁷⁷ See the recurring “terrena despiciere et amare coelestia” [disregard the worldly and love the

The *karma-mārga* is a true path that is left behind as one travels on; actions become less and less necessary, the path narrower and more overgrown—that is to say, less of a path—and man becomes free of his *karman*, which is jettisoned as the ascent proceeds. *Karma-mārga* is not a compromise with the world or a less radical way than the others. We have already mentioned how it is essentially linked to sacrifice, that is, to the sundering of planes, to offering, and to holocaust. The spirituality of action in Hinduism is not naturalism or activism; it is not a mere social act to repair this world (although this is not excluded), but rather, it is an authentic religious path.

The dogma of the resurrection of the flesh, at least in the taxative form of Christianity, is lacking in Hinduism—although it is also absent from the actual day-to-day Christian experience. This means that a large part of the spirituality of action does not claim to also redeem the flesh or sustain the body, but all action has a cosmic repercussion, and thus karmic *dharma* in a way also subsumes the cosmos. As we have already said, activity keeps the world in cohesion.

A good part of *karma-mārga* leads into Tantric spirituality that, without accepting or recognizing the resurrection of the flesh, goes in the same direction, and indeed, in some cases, goes even further. As we shall see later on, Tantrism does not wish anything to be lost. It wishes to recover everything and seeks to achieve the greatest integration possible. Action and the works within Tantrism are themselves salvific in character, because salvation consists in nothing less than erasing the traveled path and reintegrating that which in time and space is still found scattered and disintegrated. Thus action is the salvific act par excellence, because it is that activity that reestablishes unity and achieves integration.

The Path of Contemplation—*Jñāna-mārga*

India is deservedly or undeservedly famous for being the land of contemplation par excellence. We shall limit ourselves to describing this path of salvation, which for many is the most perfect, admitting from the start that we are not dealing with any kind of epistemological problem, or rather the complex and rich Indic speculation over the *pramāṇa* or valid means of knowledge.⁷⁸

The Origin of the Path of Wisdom

We have written wisdom so as not to use another, more adequate word if purged of the taste acquired during our times, due to the misuse the word has had in Christian culture, in spite of its triumphant beginning. We are referring to the word *gnōsis*.⁷⁹ In fact, *jñāna* means *gnōsis*. Indeed, they both stem from a common root word passed on from Latin to Romance languages (as in, for example, French *connaissance*) meaning also to cause to be born, produce, assimilate with spiritual metabolism that identifies the knower with the known.⁸⁰

heavenly] of Christian liturgy, especially St. Peter Damian's prayer: "ut per terrestrium rerum contemptum . . ." [so that, through the disregard of the worldly . . .].

⁷⁸ See Glossary.

⁷⁹ There is a vast bibliography on the subject. See esp. Casey (1935); Doresse (1984); DuPont (1949); García Bazán (1978; 2000); Jonas (2000); Montserrat Torrents (1983); Orbe (1976); Puech (1982); Piñero et al. (1997); Shoham (1999); Schultz (1986); Simonetti (1993); Sloterdijk & Macho (1991).

⁸⁰ The root word *jñā* undoubtedly means to know, and the same goes for (*gig*) *gnosco* (to know), although it cannot be stated with grammatical certainty that it is also the common root word for *gignomai* and (*g*)*nascor* [to be born], etc.

Etymology also provides us here with the key to glimpse the origin of the path of *gnôsis* as a path to salvation. *Jñāna*, in fact, does not mean a mere speculative knowing or mere external knowing, but rather it means true human action itself or, even better, cosmotheandric action. A very simplified line of reasoning is as follows:

Man aspires to saving himself, that is, to fulfill his plenitude, his end, and his freedom. This demands an action. This action is sacrifice, in the Vedic and classical sense of the word. But the essence of sacrifice is not external action, but its inner soul. This consists of what is known as faith (*śrāddha*), in other words, the inner disposition of (active or passive) sacrificers that leads them to "believe" in the reality (efficiency) of the liturgic act.⁸¹ This faith, which at first appears to be above all an integral trust in the "truth" of sacrifice, with the evolution of human consciousness, is interiorized and intellectualized, being transformed into a conviction sui generis, fruit of a special knowledge that, precisely, is *jñāna*—that which later on, depending on which school, would take on different names and would be endowed with different qualities.⁸² It is this knowledge that brings with it all the fruit of liturgical action, and which then, later, replaces it when the whole essence of sacrifice has been concentrated in faith.⁸³ It is known that there has been an interiorization and sublimation of the Vedic sense of sacrifice, as a means of obtaining tangible goods, in an Upaniṣadic way, as a means of salvation.⁸⁴

One characteristic of *jñāna* remains intact: its soteriological character, for being the authentic sacrifice of man as an intellectual being.⁸⁵ *Jñāna* has the power to save because it is an action, the true action. It seems to us that this is the starting point from which to later on deny reality to what has not been brought to light by this higher knowledge.

The active character of *gnôsis* is unimpaired as long as it is not disconnected from faith—as long as one believes in what knowledge (*gnôsis*) accomplishes. When *śrāddha* declines, *jñāna* loses a large part of its salvific character, bringing about severe consequences for later evolution. Indeed, *gnôsis* can save us, as it leads us to true reality, we could say—to the essence of what is psychosomatically realized in sacrifice. But when faith declines, or clearer still, when *gnôsis* reveals nothing more than the mere concept of sacrifice, without itself being sacrifice (of the truth) for having been reduced to purely rational understanding, this denies us the transit and interrupts the dynamism of sacrificial action. *Gnôsis* shows us what reality truly is; *Brahman* is discovered. However, the Absolute cannot become, nor can it vary; it is immutable. Sacrifice is thus transformed into a simple rational discovery and not the conquest of salvation. True understanding demands, or brings with it, the destruction of all obstacles that stand in the way of such a discovery. This would be the perennial temptation of *jñāna-mārga*, to cease being *mārga* to become mere speculation. Hence, great followers of

⁸¹ *Śrāddha* comes from *śrād* and *dha*. *Śrād* (*śrat*), according to Yaksā, *Naighantuka*, III.10 (in Monier-Williams [1974]), would mean *satya*, that is, truth, reality (which would corroborate our thesis) and would seem to be associated with *credo* (from *cre* and *do*), *cor-cordis* and with the Greek *kardia* (heart: although the relationship between *credo* and *cor* is doubted these days). Mayrhofer (1956–1980) *sub voce* *śrāddha* thinks this is correct. *Śrāddha* suggests the aspect of trust, of putting your heart into it, trusting in the truth, of applying it and achieving it.

⁸² See the thirty Sanskrit names as homomorphic equivalents of the concept of philosophy in Panikkar (1997/XXXIX).

⁸³ See BG IX.22–25: "whoever gives sacrifice (worships) with faith and love, whether it be to other [unorthodox] Gods, worships Me."

⁸⁴ See Levi (1898); Vesci (1994).

⁸⁵ See TS V.3.12.2; BS III.4; CU I.1.10, etc.

jñāna-mārga, for instance, such as Śaṅkara, in spite of the fact of his radical doctrine, always knew how to combine it with *bhakti* spirituality.⁸⁶

Let us sum up before moving on: the *jñāna-mārga*, the path of wisdom, is not just simple intellectual or theoretical knowledge (in the modern sense of these words) but rather the soul of the path of action (*karma-mārga*), the human—that is, conscious—participation in the task of “constructing our salvation,” to echo the last words of Buddha. Hence, once again, in reality, the so-called three *mārga* are three paths with the same route. There are no specialized fragments in spiritual life, although there may be different styles and moods.

The Prior Necessary Conditions for Gñosis

Each spiritual school has formulated the necessary conditions for acquiring this saving *gnosis*—that, as we have already said, is very far from being a mere reflection disconnected from day-to-day reality. *Gñosis*, the salvific knowledge, does not arise if the aspirant (*sādhaka*) is not adequately prepared.⁸⁷ *Gñosis* is not disconnected from life; on the contrary, it is true introduction into Life. Let us point out the difference between this education in wisdom—to attain inner freedom that allows us to realize ourselves, enjoy life, and thus achieve human plenitude—and the so-called education of nowadays, teaching us how to strive to survive economically, arming pupils with “information” as weapons necessary to triumph in social competitiveness—so as to “make a living,” according to the degradation of the well-known phrase, which formally meant achieving eternal Life. In reality, to discover the inner world one must withdraw somewhat from (not be swallowed by) the outer world.

Given that the path of contemplation *jñāna-mārga* is a path toward salvation—that is, a path for Life—Hinduism does not force anyone to take on this task, but it does warn us that education for this path requires great effort and discipline. It is not everyone who feels the call to set out on this path but only those who are touched by grace (*anugraha*) whether directly because of the descent of divine power (*śaktipāta*) or whether through our own will, as intermediate Hinduism, as in almost all traditional religions, considers that it is only the few who are realized, liberated, and achieve salvation.⁸⁸ Its caste system allows those who do not feel the call to their second birth (*dvija*) to be left in peace. To avoid misunderstanding when interpreting anthropology by means of ideas extraneous to it, one must say, in spite of having been mistreated by egocentric interpretations, this idea is not an aberration. Just as it is not unjust that there are cows and human beings, and the former do not envy the latter, there are some human beings who are born at a higher level and others who are not, although every human being can actualize their potential of becoming *brahman*—or son of God in Christian terms. The philosophical problem is deducing if it is because of “predestination,” grace, voluntary effort, or caste.

However that may be, for those who, for whatever reason, feel the “call” (so to speak), it is an extremely arduous path, as we shall see.

We have said that all authentic knowledge is not mere information, but rather “education” in its primal sense of *educere*, to draw out, to allow to surface, to be able “to lead” (*ducere*) the learner to the plenitude of life. This is *initiation* or *dīkṣā*.⁸⁹ But to achieve this

⁸⁶ Well known is the “scandal” provoked by Śaṅkara himself when celebrating, as an only son, his widowed mother’s funeral (it was justified not by him but by her).

⁸⁷ See Glossary.

⁸⁸ See Mt 22:14.

⁸⁹ The word has been triply interpreted: (1) as a compound from the root word *da* (give) and *ksi*

act there is a need for there to be something inside to be brought to light (into action) and a "conductor" who realizes such action. All initiation requires someone to plant this seed of a new life and someone to make it germinate to be able to acquire this saving knowledge. Hence the function of the *guru* and the meaning of initiation: the second birth (*dvija*) that we previously mentioned.⁹⁰

It is significant that the profound sense of initiation has been more preserved in primordial religions (such as African ones) than in more institutionalized ones.⁹¹ It would seem as if modern society had overcome such rites, although they persist in desacralized form (such as entering university, etc.) or in private societies (such as the Masons, among others). Again it is significant to see how "the ontological mutation of the existential condition" (Eliade) has been reduced to merely sociological "rites of passage." Thus, baptism is trivialized when it is exclusively interpreted as giving entry into a visible church, or the *dikṣā*, when the act is limited to a mantra being given by the master to the disciple or the rutinary imposition of the sacred cord (*upanayana*). The profound meaning of these rites is lost when this religious invariant element is interpreted from the standpoint of merely biological bipartite anthropology. Playing around with the two Greek words that mean life—*bios* and *zôê*—we could say that the prevailing anthropology considers man to be a merely biological being and paradoxically forgets his zoological nature.⁹² In biological anthropology the life of man, with or without divine intervention for its soul, is complete with birth, and later only needs to be developed. In tripartite anthropology human life is not complete until experiencing a second birth through which man obtain its maturity and full humanity, and that makes man differ from animals—beings with "*anima*." In contrast, man is a being also gifted with spirit, as we mentioned earlier.⁹³ Initiation is the true symbol of this second birth that is required for becoming fully human. The actual initiation consists in the act by which human beings become themselves and are (simultaneously) aware of the fact. They acquire their personality by becoming aware of their identity.⁹⁴ Degeneration of initiation comes about when any *organization* claims exclusivity of that regeneration—which does not mean that initiation is not the work of a social *organization*. There is no self-initiation.

The different schools of Hinduism, or more exactly *sampradāya*, bestow this initiation in very different ways and generally distinguish various stages that correspond to the *adhikāra*'s

(destroy); (2) proceeding from the root word *diks* (consecrate—and appears as such in the *AV*; (3) as a derivative of the same verb *daki* (grow, augment)—but all cases the meaning is that of overcoming the condition of mere animality.

⁹⁰ The following bibliography will be useful: Ancochea & Toscano (1997) (with a wide range of work in Spanish); Bujo (1987); Canny (1939); Eliade (1991b; 1989); Guénon (1983; 1985; 1986); Heiler (1979); Loeb (1929); Stevenson (1971); Thurnwald (1940). For two summaries, see Grohs (1993), vol. 3, and the introduction "Initiation" in Eliade (1987), vol. 8.

⁹¹ In this respect the work *Les Rites de passage* by Gennep (1969) is a classic. It is still valid in spite of countless interpretations on the phenomenon of initiation.

⁹² Although both *bios* (Latin *vivus*, Sanskrit *jīva*) and *zôê* come from the Hindū-European root word *g(w)ei*, the former has a more individual connotation (e.g., biography) than the latter (e.g., zoology). New Testament Greek, with antecedents in Classical Greek, makes a fundamental difference between the two words. Thus, for instance, in John when referring to "life" in the beginning (1:4), or the "life" promised by Jesus (esp. 10:10), *zôê* and not *bios* is spoken of. Significantly the Anglo-Saxon root for life (life, *Leben*) is associated with the body (*Lieb*).

⁹³ According to this anthropology, the (complete) human being is senses, mind, intellect, mystery, and spirit.

⁹⁴ See Bujo (1987).

or aspirant's progression. We shall disregard this enormous variety and concentrate on some of the outstanding features that enable us to grasp an idea of the ambience in Hindū spirituality.⁹⁵

Mumukṣutva (Aspiring to Liberation)

Mumukṣutva would be the existential state of a burning aspiration for realization or salvation (*mukti*). Without this disposition for passionately desiring truly real life there cannot be any spirituality. Spiritual sloth (*acedia*) is the death of any truly human life. God vomits the lukewarm.⁹⁶

Within *jñāna-mārga*, this aspiration to be liberated, which implies the inner disposition to use those means that are believed to be conducive to this end, becomes *brahmajijñāsā*, or desire to know *Brahman*. This expression constitutes the beginning of one of the most famous books with the highest level of authority in Hinduism that has been commented upon by great posterior philosophers: the *Brahma-sūtra*.⁹⁷

The aspiration to know The Absolute, or desired knowledge of Brahman, is an indispensable condition to commence the arduous ascent to *gnōsis*. A verbal clarification can help to clear up one common misunderstanding—especially when dealing with Buddhism even more so than Hinduism.⁹⁸ The grammatical form of *jijñāsā* is known as the “desiderative,” and Buddha's fierce criticism of any “desire”—the word “thirst,” which is how the word *taṇha* in Pali (*trṣṇā* in Sanskrit) is usually translated. In any case, it is not a question here of the desire for liberation (which could become an obstacle), but rather the *aspiration* toward it. The former (desire) is stirred by an external object that attracts us and moves our will; the latter (aspiration) emerges from an inner “inspiration” that comes from the internal dynamism of our being. The former enslaves us, the latter is our very breath—although the verbal difference may be a little artificial. This distinction is important to dispel the still very common misunderstanding between the West's “desire” for human perfectionism in all senses and an indolent East that suppresses all “desire.”⁹⁹

Nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka

(Discrimination between Temporal and Eternal Things)

Nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka, “discrimination between temporal and eternal things,” is another required condition. A perfect knowledge of perennial order (*nitya*) is not needed, but we do require discrimination (*viveka*) of things, elements (*vastu*) that separate, separating us from everything that, being temporal—better said, nonperennial and nonnecessary—cannot nurture reality or salvation.¹⁰⁰ This phrase is usually translated as we have stated, as

⁹⁵ See the by now classical conditions of Śaṅkara in his introduction to his commentary on the *BS*, later commented upon by Vacaspati Miśra (1933) in the *Bhamati*—his classical *Catussutri*, or commentary on the first four *sūtras* of the *BS*.

⁹⁶ See *AU* III.16.

⁹⁷ Famous aphoristic collection of philosophy from the Upaniṣads probably written around the second century BC by Badarayana. See modern editions by Vireśvarananda (1948) and the one by Radhakrishnan (1960), both with original text, translation, and commentaries based on tradition, each with their own introductions. See in Spanish Martin (2000) and Palma (1997).

⁹⁸ See Panikkar (1994/X), pp. 121–23, commenting on the double meaning of the desiderative *jijñasa* from the verb to know (as we have said, from the root *jñā*).

⁹⁹ See Panikkar (1999/XIX), p. 271.

¹⁰⁰ See the beautiful Buddhist fable of the young aristocrat Rattapala, who has renounced all the pleasures in life because he has discovered their nonpermanence (*Majjhima-nikaya* 82, Rattapalasutta).

"discernment or discrimination between the temporal and the eternal" due to inveterate mental habits.¹⁰¹ In fact, it does not concern the dichotomy between what is temporal and what is eternal, but rather discrimination between *nitya* (innate, permanent, necessary, stable . . .) things and those that are not (*anitya*)—between reality and that which appears to be.¹⁰² This *viveka* (discernment, discrimination . . .) is, on one hand, the condition for, and on the other hand, a result of the same *gnôsis* that endows us with the correct judgment (*viveka*) of reality. Here, as on so many other occasions, we are not dealing with a vicious circle but with a benign circle—or rather a vital circle, since it is life that breaks the vicious circle of mere intellect. In other words, one cannot aspire to the saving *gnôsis* if we do not devote ourselves to cultivating what we, very gradually, discover to be real, and discarding that which is transitory and intranscendent. *Gnôsis* seems to be a gift, but this gift is not presented to those who do not devote themselves to the attainment of what is really important. Spirituality is not a minor affair. Owing to the identification of that which is permanent and real with the *âtman*, a later tradition has interpreted this condition as *âtmanâtma-vastuviveka*, the distinction between that which is (*âtman*) the "spirit" and that which is not (*anâtman*), appearances, between the spiritual and that which is not. A text from the Upaniṣads says,

By seeing the self in all beings and all beings in the self, one attains the transcendental Brahman, not by any other means.¹⁰³

Ihā-amutra-phala-bhoga-vairāgyya
(Renunciation of the Reward for Good Deeds Done)

Ihā-amutra-phala-bhoga-vairāgyya is "renunciation of the reward for good deeds done (one's own actions) here and in the beyond." One cannot set out on the path of *gnôsis* with any hope or expectation of success, without total sincerity and a nonutilitarian disposition to search only for *Brahman* in itself, and not for the reward this may bring. Utilitarian knowledge is not, in fact, real knowledge but rather information to be managed (used) with more or less egocentric aims. True (contemplative) knowledge is not a means-for (something else). Again we find ourselves faced with the mortal divorce between knowledge and love. The path of contemplation means, for the subject who sets about tackling it, the utter and total detachment from any form of egotism. The "ego" is precisely considered to be the most radical obstacle for attaining salvific or redeeming knowledge, not only for ethical reasons, but, above all, because of an incompatibility of principle between any kind of egocentricity and the search for a Truth that cannot be our creature.

This redeeming knowledge, not only epistemological but ontological knowledge, makes

The epigram for the difference between the temporal and eternal is the Buddha's celebrated phrase, "That which is not eternal is not worth man enjoying, it does not even deserve being greeted, or that man pay any attention to it." It is here in this Buddhist text that it is said that *dharma* (*dhamma*) is beautiful at the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful at the end. "Lovely," translates Horner (1957).

¹⁰¹ See the—famous in its time—work on Ignatian spirituality from Nieremberg (1640) of the same title.

¹⁰² Again, we would repeat that words are something more than concepts, and in this case "temporality" and "eternity" have different connotations. Hence, the study of "the other's" spirituality may on one hand disorientate (undermining our certainties), yet at the same time enrich the symbolic value of words and make us immune from possible fanaticism.

¹⁰³ *KaivU* 10.

us one with what we know and does not simply present us with information or news about it. That is why it entails praxis just as much as theory. Thus, without *viraga* (indifference, detachment) vis-à-vis enjoyment (*bhoga*) of the fruits (*phala*) of our actions, here and beyond (*īhamuttra*), we cannot attain that freedom from all our conditioning necessary for our liberation. Any action realized to obtain a specific end may or may not accomplish it, but human plenitude or salvation is not the “fruit” of any action. Therefore the renunciation of all fruit is necessary. In other words, pureness of heart is an indispensable requisite on the path to salvation.

This renunciation is not negative ascetism; it is not inhumane indifference or comfortable withdrawal—although the dangers of wavering off course and “just giving up” are apparent. *Dharma*, as its name indicates, does not dislocate, but links together, “relegates”: it is religion.

How does one find the strength for such renunciation?

Hindū spirituality has a triple answer—and saying “triple” does not mean that it has three answers, but rather the three braided into one. In the first place, the grace that impels us; second, the faith that makes it known to us; and third, the experience that confirms it. One does not renounce one element to be in favor of another at a higher level. This could create complexes and resentment. Something is renounced when it is discovered that “it” is of no use to me. Thus, renunciation happens connaturally, when our hearts are pure.

Sādhana

Along with the negative condition of the mentioned renunciation, tradition also considers the positive practice of virtues as a condition on the path toward *gnōsis*. The word *sādhana* is usually translated “spiritual path” and is equipped with the means to accomplish salvation; it is the discipline that the *sādhaka*, the disciple, follows. Every school of spirituality has its set of virtues.¹⁰⁴ One particular school makes the following summary:

- Control of the mind (calm, equanimity, serenity, *śama*)
- Domination over one’s senses (self-control, ascetism, *dam*)
- Renunciation, indifference (toward even good and lawful deeds, *uparati*)
- Patience (strength in suffering hardships and punishments, *titikṣa*)
- Concentration of the mind (attention, seriousness, *samādhana*)
- Faith (trust, *śrāddha*)

To give an idea of the spiritual climate, we shall mention the eight virtues of intelligence given by sages in the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Valmiki:¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Grimes (1996) describes twelve schools belonging to twelve religions as spiritual paths: Jainism (with its three jewels), Buddhism (with its eightfold path), *samkhya* (discriminating between matter and spirit), *yoga* (with its eight disciplines), *mimamsa* (action), *advaita-vedānta* with its perfect knowledge), *viśiṣṭadvaita* (with its total abandonment [to God]), *advaita dvaita-vedānta* (discriminating between created and Creator), *śaiva-siddhanta* (worshipping God), *virā-saivism* (with its five precepts), *śivaism* of Kashmir (with its identification with *Śiva*), and *śivadvaita* (as perfect contemplation). We provide this scheme as an example of the complexity of *dharma* in Hinduism—also adding that each one of these schools of spirituality has its countless subdivisions.

¹⁰⁵ *Rām IV.54.1–2*, Valmiki (1969), to which we could add the popular *Rāmāyaṇa* by Tulsidas of the sixteenth century (Prasad [1993]). Concerning the latter it is worth mentioning Vaudeville (1955a; 1955b), who also translated the second book of the great poem (*Ayodhyakāṇḍa*).

- Willingness to listen (to others)—*śuṣruva*
- The act of listening—*śravaṇam*
- The capacity of understanding what is said—*grahaṇam*
- The memory of what is learned—*dharāṇam*
- The understanding of the positive aspects of what is learned—*uhaḥ*
- The understanding of the opposite reasons of what is learned—*apohaḥ*
- Intuition of what is learned—*arthavijñānam*
- Wisdom acquired (through what is learned)—*tattvajñānam*

The *Rāmāyaṇa* itself mentions what is known as the quadruple strength or virtue in using the means to overcome in the struggle for life:

- The capacity for persuasion and reconciliation—*sama*
- Generosity—*dana*
- Subtlety—*bheda*
- Strength—*daṇḍa*

Which are followed by the fourteen “excellences”:

- Opportunity (sense of time and place)—*deśakālaṇa*
- Stability—*dardhyam*
- Courage (to overcome any hardship)—*sarvakleśasahiṣṇata*
- Knowledge of all things—*sarvavijñānita*
- Righteousness—*dakṣyam*
- Fervent devotion (enthusiasm, keenness)—*urjaḥ*
- Discretion (on guard)—*saṁvṛta-mantrata*
- Coherence—*avisamvadita*
- Heroism—*sauryam*
- Awareness of one’s own capacities (and others’)—*śaktijñāta*
- Gratitude (for services received)—*kṛtajñāta*
- Magnanimity with the displaced (immigrants)—*śaraṇagatavatsalyam*
- Ability to be indignant—*amarṣitva*
- Perseverance—*acapalam*

We shall abstain from any commentaries be they on the ethics of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, or in general, confining ourselves to saying that Hindū spirituality, as in all spiritualities, requires praxis, asceticism, and *sādhana* as a preconditioned necessity to achieve happiness and liberation. Perhaps this simple list will help readers to consider whether “they practice virtue.”

Indeed, on the other hand, simply having set out on the path toward the desired goal will perfect these virtues, which at the outset will surely be in need of perfection. Nevertheless, there are schools that strongly emphasize the gratuity of the Gnostic vision and the inadequacy of any human means to achieve it. Here we can quote from a famous text:

The way to reach the *ātman* is not by means of instruction, not even through intelligence, or even hearing [the Scriptures]. Solely the one whom It chooses can reach

It; to whom Its true nature is revealed.¹⁰⁶

Summarizing these conditions, we could say that the fundamental requisite lies in “conversion,” that is, the radical change in our existence, from worldly (*laukika*) to sacred, from the order of phenomenal knowledge (*vyāvahārika*) to the order of the ultimate reality (*pāramārthika*).¹⁰⁷

This conversion is already insisted upon in the Upaniṣad when we are told that the *ātman* must not be searched for through our senses in the outer world, but rather in the inner world,¹⁰⁸ within the city of nine¹⁰⁹ or eleven¹¹⁰ doors, which represent the different senses man has to communicate with the outer world. This conversion is not only psychological but moral:

Those who have not abandoned their bad ways, who are not serene or prepared, whose minds are not at peace cannot reach It [the *ātman*, absolute] through any adequate knowledge.¹¹¹

And this is repeated over and over again in many other texts.¹¹² Moreover, this conversion is ontological in nature. Accordingly, true *gnōsis* is not the conclusion of a syllogism, nor can it be reached by a simple effort of our intelligence.¹¹³ The whole theory of grace of Hinduism finds in this point its doctrinal crimp.¹¹⁴

Contemplation

Contemplation is a word with a Latin source, which Latin tradition took to correspond to the Greek word *theoria*.¹¹⁵ We take it as a possible translation for our term *jñāna*, adding the fact that it does not concern mere theory or simple speculation, but rather the typically human attitude—and as such an intellectual and cordial attitude—that implies a conscious participation in the systole and diastole of the entire universe, in life, in reality.

Without entering into a detailed description of this *jñāna*, *vidyā*, or *vijñāna*, the majority of schools coincide on the following.

The aim of human life is the plenitude of man, his happiness, his freedom, not only in the anthropocentric sense, but in the total sense of liberation of the whole cosmos

¹⁰⁶ *KathU* I.2.23 (II.23 according to another numeration). (See *ibid.* I.2.9 for the same idea.) See also *MundU* II.2.3.

¹⁰⁷ These two expressions, to which illusory knowledge (*pratibhasik*) could be added, are basic categories in the *advaita-vedānta*.

¹⁰⁸ *KathU* II.1.1.

¹⁰⁹ *SU* III.18; *BG* V.13.

¹¹⁰ *KathU* V.1.

¹¹¹ *KathU* I.2.24.

¹¹² See esp. *BU* IV.4.23; *MundU* III.1.3; III.1.8.

¹¹³ See *KathU* I.2.22; *IsU* 9 (see *BU* IV.4.10), *MundU* III.2.4.

¹¹⁴ See note 102. See also Vadakkekara (1981) for a comparative study between Hindū and Christian theories on grace, and also Raj (1990).

¹¹⁵ The *DS* develops the idea of “Contemplation,” to which 551 columns (259 pages) are dedicated, on the entire history of this notion in Christian mysticism. Referring to Greek philosophers (especially Neoplatonic ones) and the Greek Church translating *theory* by *contemplation*. See *DS* (1920–95, 2:1643–2193).

from the mere mechanism of *samsāra*—since man is not just an individual but a person, constitutively bound to total reality. Another manner of speech would be to talk about the union with that mystery superior to human beings, which in many traditions is known as God. This union is achieved by means of the communion established between God and human beings when the latter “know” or “realize” the *satyasya satyam* (true of the truth), true reality. The contemplation of this “realization” of the Truth, that is to say, our union with God (with the caution that each school does well to exercise) is realized in virtue of the unifying strength of *gnōsis*.

The first characteristic of contemplation is its immediacy. Contemplation is not the awareness of a reality that is other than us, such as an object (*ob-jectum*), but rather the conscious union with the reality that we (too) are. That which is contemplated is “seen,” is sensed (contemplated) directly, forming part of ourselves without any intermediary—where the “self” is not an individual but rather the person in the sense indicated above. The main consequence of this immediacy is the disappearance of the object as an ob-ject, since the distance between the *sub-jectum* and the *ob-jectum* has vanished when suppressing any mediation between both. The union is complete. This entails that the contemplator does not see what is contemplated as being contemplated, as being seen, but rather as the contemplator, as a seer. This inversion of subjects is achieved in the very act of contemplation.¹¹⁶ Because of this, contemplation entailing no action does not deserve the name. What is more, one criterion for the authenticity of contemplative life is that it transforms active life. That is why when a certain a-cosmic spirituality flees from the world (*fuga mundi*), it is affirming that the world is not real—and so it does not flee from anything.

This epistemological requirement of making the knowing subject disappear is confirmed by the ontological requisite of the nature of that which is contemplated, which is nothing less than the Subject par excellence, the “I” in *aham-brahman* (I am *Brahman*)¹¹⁷ and in addition the quintessential Knower and Seer. The key question in the Upaniṣads concerning this issue is, “How can the Seer be seen?”¹¹⁸ The answer is obvious. I cannot *see* it as a “seer,” since in that case I would see the Seer as *seen*, but not the Seer as such. I can only see the Seer, seeing with It, that is, without seeing It, but rather seeing with It. And if, perchance, I wish to go into myself, for fear of becoming lost, I can be comforted by thinking that I am seen by It. But this consolation is in vain as I would become the “object” of the Seer, upon which, contemplation would vanish. Solely within the Seer have I my only refuge, in which I can “see” without being “seen,” that is, seeing with the Seer. Solely if I am within the Seer, where it is possible for a contemplation to unfold that does not shatter the absolute simplicity of the Seer, can “my” incorporation into the Seer be considered,¹¹⁹ in other words, when my ego has disappeared. *Gnōsis* or true knowledge is not private property, and it requires the pureness of heart we have mentioned. Then can I be the Seer (or part of It) without clouding Its vision. Redeeming knowledge is that which allows me to know with the Knower. “I know as soon as I am known”;¹²⁰ I am transparent.¹²¹

There is one aspect of contemplation that is worth pointing out, even if it is just to contrast with the lack of contemplative spirit in modern Western society, which has had an influence

¹¹⁶ See the chapter about “L’esperienza suprema” in Panikkar (2000/XXVII), pp. 287–311.

¹¹⁷ See *MahānārU* 157 for just one example among many.

¹¹⁸ See *BU* XV.5.15.

¹¹⁹ See Panikkar (1971/XII), p. 220, commenting upon the same phrase encountered in San Augustin.

¹²⁰ 1 Cor 12:12.

¹²¹ See Nicolas of Cusa, *De visione dei*.

on some of the most typical Western spiritualities—and the simplification here is valid. We are, strictly speaking, referring to the contemplation that in the West seems to be a specialty of special people or for those who have taken refuge in monasteries and convents—and even then not all of them. Words such as self-knowledge, understanding, equanimity, meditation, peace, attention, concentration, tranquility, happiness, patience, magnanimity, and other similar words refer to virtues to cultivate in any human being and require special *asceticism* in the traditional sense of the word—which means exercise.¹²² Here we can recall that “to enter the kingdom of heaven requires effort (*bīazetai*) and only through effort is it achieved.”¹²³

Contemplation, in a word, is that activity through which man is perfected. Stress is not so much put on “salvation” and its equivalents as on the plenitude (perfection) of the human being—and as such discovering that any egotistically motivated action is counterproductive. The first condition required is to eliminate the *ego*. And philosophically speaking, this is the requisite for a healthy balance between nature and grace (that is, between the “techniques” of contemplation such as yoga or meditation and the spontaneity and freedom of contemplative life), as true masters never tire of repeating.

It is obvious that this redeeming knowledge is not (specific) “knowledge” of all things. In the *Gītā* there is a difference between perfect, total knowledge (*krtsna*) and partial, imperfect knowledge (*akrtsna*).¹²⁴ The former knows everything as a whole, and the latter parts of the whole. The former belongs to another order, the contemplative order—which is impossible to attain without love.

A-Cosmic Spirituality

In India, one encounters all the different ranges of contemplative activity, yet there is one kind that deserves special mention for being eminently characteristic. It is one that some people think is taken too far because, aspiring to transcend everything, it transcends reality, stumbling into a nihilism other than true vacuity, the true void, so to speak. One could term this a-cosmic contemplation, pure contemplation, but we must immediately add, to avoid any confusion, that it concerns such purity that it seeks to purify one from any possible attachment to *being*. *Nirvāṇa* and *śūnya* would be the most appropriate names, but their explanation in greater detail would be far too much to tackle at this point. We shall be going over this again very briefly when we deal with *saṃnyāsa*. Here we shall seek to express ourselves in synthesis and in an understandable manner by employing concepts usual in Western languages.

Not only does it concern a kind of contemplation void of any content, but it also lacks intentionality and as such any goal; this manner of contemplation has no intention of arriving at the “self” or of “seeing” something, but rather it is pure contemplation without any object without any support, without any “being” that might underlie it or that might attract it as its end. This is not contemplation that denies the existence of the “self,” but rather it has renounced it, perhaps because it has discovered that the “self” cannot be “seen”—at most one must simply “be” it. “Abyssus abyssum invocat!”¹²⁵ Here we are walking the razor’s edge or at the top of a jagged peak: any sudden “movement” would send us plummeting into the void. Thus, total immobility, including corporal immobility, forms part of its practice.

¹²² From *askēō*, labor, mould, and hence exercise oneself.

¹²³ Mt 11:12.

¹²⁴ See *BG III.29* and also *BG XVIII.29*.

¹²⁵ Ps 42(41):8.

This typical but not exclusively Hindū kind of contemplation is not the Hellenic contemplation of "being," but rather the contemplation of nothingness, to put it paradoxically, as it obviously does not concern contemplating nothingness as an object, but rather the renunciation of any contemplated "object"; it is not that *nothingness* is contemplated but rather nothing is contemplated. Hence we have pure contemplation. While we think in terms of "being," which is the equivalent of saying while "we think" (since thought is the organ of "being"), we shall never be able to even catch a glimpse of what this is about. Pure contemplation is not mere intellectual intuition, in the sense of something that reason cloudily and imperfectly reveals to us. Contemplation manifests itself to us immediately and fully: there is nothing to see. In pure contemplation there is a radical change of field; it is not a difference of degree, but of kind. The leap transcends very being and goes beyond thought. Only very roughly can this be considered "vision," as "sight," since in fact nothing is "seen," there is no "object" to see. It cannot be said that it is a "seeing" of one's self, if this self is interpreted in a finite way and thus as an object of vision. It would be more akin to a "vision" that sees without there being anything there that constitutes the end of the vision, somewhat as if the screen or the termination of the vision were constantly disappearing into the distance, in an infinite, expanding universe that never ends.¹²⁶

The contemplation of *brahman* is not the contemplation of the "Self," and thus, the salvation that pure contemplation brings with it is not the Hellenic kind of assimilation of the Self, reached through understanding, helped along by your intellect. Pure contemplation saves because it *liberates*, from all, including being. All links or bonds vanish because the ontological suppositions that they could latch on to have also disappeared. Here we have in reality a subtle and delicate distinction: contemplation that opens up to reality and "takes in" the Void (more typical of Buddhism) and that which turns its attention on the Self and finds nothing (more typical of Hinduism)—although this not finding is rather inadequate an expression in both cases. We shall now take a closer look at this latter form of contemplation.

We are not referring to yogic meditation, which enjoins us to free ourselves from all thought,¹²⁷ to become ourselves,¹²⁸ that is to say, total isolation: *kaivalya*.¹²⁹ Nor are we referring to Buddhist doctrines on the subject of nothingness, especially those by Nāgārjuna and his school in particular¹³⁰ and not even to their Japanese version¹³¹—although these philosophies form the weave of the existential attitude we are referring to. We are referring to the a-cosmic attitude of Hindū renunciants in its most radical form. For those who embark on such a kind of contemplation, in both theoretical and vital forms, the world does not exist. This a-cosmism is not necessarily inhumane, since it respects the ignorance of others. Perhaps in our times Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950),¹³² apart from the countless *sadhus* that still exist in present-day India, could provide us with a concrete example. "Ramana does not exist, he is only existent for you" is one phrase attributed to him. "The world is a dream which is not dreamed by anyone" is another similar aphorism attributed to Sankarācārya.

¹²⁶ Something like the "Father" engendering, observing his "son" without ever "ceasing" to engender Him or yet see him. The "son" "is" never a "seen," "engendering" Son, but rather He is constantly "being born," "being seen" by his "Father."

¹²⁷ *YS* I.2.

¹²⁸ See Panikkar (1978/6).

¹²⁹ See *YS* III.55, etc.

¹³⁰ See Nāgārjuna (1903–13) for a clear example and translations by LaMotte (1981); Murti (1998); Tola-Dragonetti (1995); and Vêlez de Cea (2003).

¹³¹ Heisig (2002).

¹³² See Ramana Maharshi (1994; 1995).

When knowledge leads us to the unreality of the world, of all our thoughts about it and ourselves, we reach a radical a-cosmism (denial of the cosmos) that becomes difficult to understand, although it cannot be denied that there are *saṃnyāsin* that believe it to be as such and consequently live it as such.

One could interpret this a-cosmism as a merely psychological attitude, yet one cannot state that its representatives are pathological or demented cases under any circumstances. *Sadhus* do not bear witness, since for them there are no witnesses to bear it to, but they provide *us* with evidence of the pure contingency and the purely transcendent reality without trace of immanence. We shall come back to this subject when we describe the *saṃnyāsa*.

However that may be, this pure contemplation, even though it may not be always realized, or even accepted by everyone, is there, functioning as if from an abyss, a kind of powerful magnetism over any kind of contemplative effort and attracting like an abyss man's thirst for total liberation from the world.

The Path of Devotion—*Bhakti-mārga*

It could be said that what is known as *bhakti* is the most popular and widespread facet of Hinduism. The great temptation of the self-ordained "*intelligentsia*," both within and without the core of Hinduism, consists in giving way to the glare of mere intellect and thus subordinating *bhakti* to *jñāna*, love to knowledge, causing an injury to the very heart of man; the heart that, according to the majority of traditions, is the seat of both intellect and feeling. Let us remind ourselves that this divorce between knowledge and love is arguably the scourge of contemporary culture both in the East and the West. It is a subtle form of temptation because its reason for being is tucked away within the very method of approaching reality, in the *mārga* itself that leads us to salvation. We are aware of the path, and our ego gives priority to knowledge of the path as opposed to actually walking it. In other sections I have referred to the *new innocence*.¹³³ Perhaps the *advaita dharma* is best fitted to transform the vicious circle of mere theory into the vital circle of illuminated "praxis." A path cannot be walked assuredly unless it is known, but it cannot be known unless it is walked either. This is the profound meaning of *bhakti* as a path, that is, as a form of worship. When worship becomes a mere means, it degenerates; it becomes simply an instrument and human life loses its liturgical character: the labor of the community, living the very adventure of reality.

Bhakti as Worship

The fundamental meaning of *bhakti* is along the same lines as the other two *mārga*: it is a path to salvation, it is the redeeming action of worship. Action, in contrast to mere sacrificial rites or intellectual sacrifice (*karma-mārga* and *jñāna-mārga*, respectively), is not only limited to the objective reality or the subjective world, but rather seeks to be extended to total reality, but this time concentrated into man. *Bhakti* is anthropological worship par excellence. It is not the cosmic worship of the first Vedic period, nor is it the spiritual worship of the subsequent Upaniṣadic stage, but rather it is integral anthropological worship, not just restricted to the intellectual side of man.

If *karma-mārga* represents the path of doing and *jñāna-mārga* the path of knowing, *bhakti-mārga* stands for the path of love. If the prime factor of the first path belongs to the Self and the second is taken up by Truth, *bhakti-mārga* is ruled by Goodness,

¹³³ See Panikkar (1999/XXXII).

which must go together with Beauty.¹³⁴ The realization of Goodness and Beauty will therefore lead us to salvation, before knowledge of the Truth or the ontic plenitude of the cosmos.

It concerns giving worship to the Divinity, a kind of worship in which what is offered is the devotee himself or herself—who thus becomes divine. The essence of *bhakti* is not as much the concomitant feeling in the cultural act of the *bhakta* as the total adoration and surrender to it. In fact, *bhakti* means adoration, that is, total and absolute surrender of man toward God, “devotion” (in its primeval sense: *de-vovere*, consecration) of the creature to that which is absolute—an Absolute, however, that accepts and welcomes the total surrender of the adoring devotee and which, consequently, has to be a personal Absolute that is sensible to its devotee’s love. The *Bhagavata Purāṇa* states,

“I [the Lord], am slave to my servants [...], my heart is totally dedicated to them because I love whoever surrenders themselves to me. I do not desire absolute bliss for myself but I share it among my devotees, to those for whom I am their supreme salvation.”¹³⁵

Etymologically speaking, *bhakti*, from the root word *bhaj*, means to participate, both in the transitive sense of causing to participate and the intransitive sense of taking part. And this double sense is conserved in *bhakti* as in *mārga*: the active participation of God, of the Lord (*Bhagavan*), toward the devotee and the passive participation of the worshiper, *bhakta*, to the Divinity. God loves, and his love is communicated; the devotee worships and participates. *Bhakti* is the religion of love, hence, personal par excellence. It is not only human worship of God but it is equally God’s gift of Himself to man—hence, the notion of grace being essential to *bhakti*. The gift of God is free and completely undeserved. No one could dare to have the ability to ascend to God, much less love him, if it were not God Himself who reveals Himself to be loving and bestows His grace to enable us to love Him.¹³⁶

One already comes across the doctrine of grace in the Upaniṣads insofar as it underlines the free choice and total gratuity of God’s gift.¹³⁷ The same thing is found in the *Mahābhārata*:¹³⁸ no one can reach God on their own accord;¹³⁹ salvation is the work of grace.¹⁴⁰ There was once a time when these doctrines, similar as they are to Christian ones, were thought to have been the result of Christian influence,¹⁴¹ but these days this opinion has lost acceptance,¹⁴² in spite of the relationship between India and the Christian world being more important than is generally considered.¹⁴³

¹³⁴ Let us remind ourselves that in Greek, *to kalon*, apart from meaning that which is beautiful, also stands for good and virtue—and often go together, such as *kalokagathia*, etc.

¹³⁵ *BhagP* IX.4.63–64. See also *BG* VII.17.

¹³⁶ It is not our concern to tackle the question of the more or lesser affinity of this concept of grace in its Christian version. In our view it is an issue that still has to be explored in depth. One can consult Arokiasamy (1935); De Letter (1958); Neuner (1957); Otto (1930).

¹³⁷ See the classical *topos KathU* II.23 (1.2.23 according to another numeration) and also *MundU* III.2.3, apart from the *SU* in general (see esp. VI.21).

¹³⁸ See *MB* XII.337.20.

¹³⁹ See *MB* XI.349.75.

¹⁴⁰ See *MB* XII.349.73.

¹⁴¹ See Garbe (1914), who criticizes Weber’s theory (1867) and others.

¹⁴² See MacNicol (1968).

¹⁴³ See Benz (1951), and also the documented work of Dahlquist (1962) (with extensive bibliography).

On the subject of the historical genesis of *bhakti*, one can say that its origin dates back to the Vedic hymns themselves (to Varuṇa and to Savitr, for example) full of pious sentiment, and the last Upaniṣads of the first great period, such as the *Svetāśvatara*,¹⁴⁴ where the same word appears with the same meaning it later has in the *Gītā*¹⁴⁵ and later bibliography.¹⁴⁶ The same word is found in the grammar of Pāṇini (350 BC) and even in earlier Buddhist chants. The high point of its development is encountered in Viṣṇuism, although Tamil Śaivism represents a kind of *bhakti* that in no way loses in the comparison with the northern religion of Kṛṣṇa.¹⁴⁷

The two great *Purāṇa Viṣṇuitas*, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, are possibly the two most important *bhakti* documents from those times. The latter is the bhaktic book par excellence.¹⁴⁸ At a later date the *Narada Purāṇa* by Narada and the *Sanḍilya sūtra* by Sandilya have also become authoritative texts, as, especially the former, they contain older ideas and opinions.¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, *bhakti* does not rest on its laurels, on its ancient scriptures, but rather it is in constant renewal, and thus the great *bhaktā* extends through all the periods in Hindū culture right up until our times. Its golden age in terms of popularity was perhaps the Middle Ages, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, as we have just said, the origin of *bhakti* must be sought in the very heart of man. In spite of certain contemporary politics striving to transform Hinduism into an ideology, popular religiosity remains bhaktic.¹⁵¹

Characteristics of Bhakti

The most important theoretical presupposition of *bhakti* is theism and, more than that, the personal aspect of Divinity with which one embraces, since it is the divinity who loves us and beckons us. Despite the great philosophers, including Śaṅkara (788–820) and Rāmaṇuja (1017–1137), along with Nimbarka (thirteenth century), Madhva (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), Vallabha (1479–1531), Caitanya (1485–1533), and others, combining *bhakti* with philosophical speculation and, therefore, striving to lay down theoretical foundations, *bhakti* is above all else a praxis, a way of life, and its stress is not so much mainly placed on the concept of *bhagavan* (Lord) but rather on the preparation of the *bhaktā*, the worshiper.

¹⁴⁴ See *SU* VI.23, etc.

¹⁴⁵ The whole of Book XII is dedicated to *bhakti*.

¹⁴⁶ The whole *Narayaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* can also be considered exposition of the *bhakti* doctrine.

¹⁴⁷ See the *Tiruvacakam* by Maṇikkavacakar. For Maṇikkavacakar, opinions that range from the third to ninth centuries after Christ are found (since for the *Alvar* unacceptable dates have been mooted, which range from 4,203 to 2,706 years before Christ, while actually belonging to around the ninth century of the Christian era).

¹⁴⁸ Coming from the Tamilnadu between the tenth and eleventh centuries.

¹⁴⁹ It is difficult to pin point the exact chronology. Narada would have been tenth century, slightly later than the *Bhagavatapurāṇa*.

¹⁵⁰ Let us not forget that the history of spirituality is probably the most profound history of humankind since it narrates not so much external events, evolution of ideas, but rather the most profound moments embedded in the heart of man, and as such the chronology is not the most decisive factor—although its relationship with events and ideas should not be overlooked either.

¹⁵¹ See Ayrookuzhiel (1983) for a study of the field that, although very specific, is an example of the situation these days.

Let us go back over the lesson taught by these great philosophers we have just mentioned, among others. They teach us that authentic philosophy is not just a mere *opus rationis*, an exclusively rational exercise, but rather mystic activity compiled of action and contemplation—a path of salvation for man made up of body, soul, and spirit.

It is a practically impossible task to briefly sum up the monumental richness of *bhakti* that would explain the content of all the different tendencies within it. The following passage only seeks to explain the ambience that *bhakti* moves within.

Bhakti means absolute love for the Lord and total union with Him. It is not just mere intellectual love or passive loving sentiment, but rather it fills the entire human being. The *Bhagavata* describes this integrality by means of a description that claims to be more than just a beautiful metaphor: the spirit of king Ambariṣa, a perfect *bhakta* (one of whose legends we shall come across later on), was always fixed on Śrī Kṛṣṇa, meditating in a lotus position; the king's words solely proclaimed the wonders of the mansion of Viṣṇu; his hands always occupied in cleaning the temple of the Lord (*Hari*), his ears always intent on hearing praise for God, his eyes saw nothing else but the image of Kṛṣṇa, his body did nothing else but seek contact with those who loved God (his senses only felt divine presence), he could smell only the soft perfume of *tulasī* he lays at the Lord's feet (the omnipresent fragrance of his saintliness), his taste buds were only concerned with tasting the offering made to Him, his feet only moved in pilgrimage (only walking in His presence), his head would only bow to the sovereign Lord, his desires were only those of serving Him.¹⁵² Love divine is not an abstraction, nor is it limited to just one sense: it embraces the whole life of the *bhakta*, who never lives a single moment alone, or does anything on his or her own. The "presence of God" is the Beloved's constant companion.

The vast majority of authors coincide in recognizing a dynamic and progressive character in divine love. They usually distinguish two categories: (1) imperfect (*apara*), relative (*saguṇa*), secondary (*gaunī*), interested (*haitukī*), and so on and so forth, devotion, and (2) love (*prema*), perfect (*para*), absolute (*nirguṇa*), replenished (*siddha*), disinterested (*ahaitukī*), and so on.

Imperfect Devotion

The first group of *bhakti* is usually split up according to the three subdivisions (*guṇa*) of man: *tamas*, *rajas*, and *sattva*.¹⁵³ The first of these qualities according to the *saṃkhya* (and the division is accepted almost universally) represents the dark, lazy, inert, and material aspect of our being. The devotion of *tamasic* human beings is their attachment to God to be helped along with their laziness or with their own, not particularly noble and more or less always egotistical, designs. The second quality represents the active and virile element in human beings. *Rajaistic* devotion is love that is interested in personal, basically egotistical gain, although this gain in itself may not be bad in its intent. The third quality represents purity and illumination. *Sattvic* devotion prays to God for spiritual perfection of the world and loves the Lord for himself and not for any other interested motive whatsoever.¹⁵⁴

Another division in this first group of *bhakti* that overlaps or superimposes upon the former is based on the love of man toward God by virtue of three different motives: (1) to

¹⁵² See *BhagP* X.29.15ff. (Having lost the original version of the first edition, I have not been able to verify the quotes from this Purana.)

¹⁵³ The importance of these three qualities is fundamental in all Hinduism. The caste system itself is related to them, and we discuss it more later. On the subject of their origin: Senart (1915;1925); Falk (1986) can be consulted, apart from general works.

¹⁵⁴ See *BhagP* III.29.8ff. We shall omit references from the Upaniṣads and the *Gītā* for being overnumerous.

enable us to get out of trouble and free ourselves from hardship, which through our own fault we have deserved; (2) to obtain riches, whether it be material wealth, or plenitude of a higher order, but only to satisfy a sort of intellectual curiosity; and (3) finally, with no other reason but for the greatness and glory of the Beloved.

The *Bhagavata* talks about nine characteristics of divine love from this first group that, like stairs on a stairway, have to be overcome to embrace pure love, which is the only love that saves:¹⁵⁵

Hearing, singing, remembering Vishnu, attending to the *feet*, offering worship and prayers, becoming a servant, being a friend, and surrendering one's soul are of all the people who are of sacrifice the nine ways making up the *bhakti* that should be performed unto the Supreme Lord of Vishnu; the completion of which I consider the topmost of learning.¹⁵⁶

Hearing the praise of the Lord and his name (*śravaṇa*).

Singing his glories and his name (*kīrtana*).

Loving consideration, happy memories of the Lord (*smaraṇa*).

Being in His service (*pada-sevana*, literally means attending to the feet).

Worship and honor (*arkana*).

Salutation and glorification (*vandana*).

Life, consecrated to His service (*dasya*, duty of the servant to the master).

Activity of the disciple friend (*sakhyā*).

Consecration of our person, sacrifice of one's self (*ātmanivedana*).

Pure Love

Pure love joins the lover with the Beloved, in such a manner that they cannot be distinguished.¹⁵⁷ Pure love destroys all other affection and attachment toward the creature; the *bhakta's* mind is fixed (*ekanta*) on his or her beloved, and they do not even own to the independence and separation of their soul (*kaivalya*).¹⁵⁸ Their indifference toward everything else is absolute, the *bhakta* does not belong, their love has consecrated and transformed them. Their only suffering is to sometimes feel separated from their love, but this very suffering is taken as another form of love.

Narada describes eleven forms of this kind of pure love that are realized depending on the greater and lesser degree of temperament of the *bhakta* and that also represent the immense variety of earthly playing out of divine love:

Falling in love with the attributes and magnificence of God *ad extra*.

Love of the Contemplation of His inner beauty.

Love of worship.

Love of the contemplation with the constant representation (memory) of the Lord.

Love of the servant for their absolute master (the process of personalization begins).

Love for the intimacy of friendship.

¹⁵⁵ *BhagP* I.2.6.

¹⁵⁶ *BhagP* VII.5.22–23.

¹⁵⁷ *NarS* 41.

¹⁵⁸ *BhagP* XI.20.34. This could be a false criticism that overlaps yoga spirituality (with its ideal in *kaivalya*).

Filial love.

Individual betrothal, God being considered as the divine husband and the devotee the loving and faithful wife.

Total consecration to the beloved, without separation from will.

Love of being absorbed in thought of Him, with no manner of separation.

Love of the inauthentic separation that still exists on Earth, while souls in love still wander there, chained to their mortal body.

Although devotional service is one, it becomes manifested in eleven forms of attachment: attachment to the Lord's glorious qualities, to His beauty, to worshipping Him, to remembering Him, to serving Him, to reciprocating with Him as a friend, to caring for Him as a parent, to dealing with Him as a lover, to surrendering one's whole self to Him, to being absorbed in the thought of Him, and to experiencing separation from Him. This last is the supreme attachment.¹⁵⁹

This union still has an aftertaste of egoism, while the pains of separation, and during the separation, of those who know themselves to be one are not only the test of maximum love, but supreme love, since when the separation is suffered in such a way, in the end, there is a greater union than this absorption, that would seem to replenish the fire of love. Supreme love is nourished on the tension of the separation within the unity.¹⁶⁰ Again we encounter the *advaita*.

Bhaktic Polymorphism

Although the most appropriate field for *bhakti* would be theism, India offers indubitable examples of *bhakta* within the purest *advaita* and yet without transcending idolatry. All forms of thinking seem to be compatible with *bhakti*. This fits in well with the existential character of Hinduism alluded to in the introduction.

There is an extremely wide range of schools of *bhakti* spirituality. The experience of *iṣṭa-devata*, probably of Tantric origin, finds its practical use here. *Iṣṭa-devata* means the Deity or, better put, the appreciable form of Deity (*mantra*, image, icon, *murti*, etc.), which is generally appropriately given by spiritual masters (*guru*) to their disciples (*śiṣya*), depending on their temperament (*bhava*) and their idiosyncrasy (*guṇa*). God adjusts and molds to the temperament and character of devotees. Moreover, the concept of *avatara* or descent of Divinity to a created being is related with this divine condescension toward man.¹⁶¹ It would be convenient to recuperate the notion of *iṣṭa-devata* because far too often it has been interpreted as something merely subjective, such as that favorite image that most deeply inspires me individually and which I choose to stand for my piety. Strictly speaking, *iṣṭa-devata* is not the image of my personal individual whim, but rather it responds to much deeper intuition. An *iṣṭa-devata* is more than a simple icon, even in the most profound sense of Oriental Christianity. The divine mystery is absolutely transcendent, inaccessible, and incognoscible; however human beings "know" of this mystery and cannot live without an image, a symbol, a name, an idea, a manifestation, a revelation . . . of this mystery. The Eucharistic presence—for instance, Christian—is the

¹⁵⁹ *NarS* 82.

¹⁶⁰ A monographic study on the subject of the trinitary connotation of bhaktic mysticism would prove of great interest.

¹⁶¹ See the famous passage in the *BG* IV.7–8 to be quoted later on.

real presence of Christ, and nonetheless, if a dog takes the consecrated host it does not receive the body of Christ. A homomorphic equivalent would be the *iṣṭa-devata*. When we speak of God, "we know" that speaking "correctly" makes no sense because the referent is inexorable, it is empty, it does not express what it "says," yet it precisely encounters its symbolism in the *iṣṭa-devata*. Solely believers reach *pisteuma*, a philosophical way of looking at things.¹⁶² Or, to be exact, rather than "knowing," this is tasting or loving more than *epistème*, than merely speculative knowledge. Hence, *bhakti* spirituality, which is neither merely objective, nor purely subjective, has cultivated this notion to a greater extent. On the one hand, *iṣṭa-devata* allows for *iconolatry* without lapsing into idolatry, and on the other, neither does it just become an idealistic abstraction.¹⁶³ God is neither a thing (idolatry) nor an idea (idealism). The *icon* only really becomes one in the act of *latría*, which requires the faith of the worshiper. Yet the icon is not just any image. The artist's inspiration is not enough; "expiration," the descent of the divine, is needed, generally realized in the liturgical act.

In accordance with this spirit, *bhakti* takes on thousands of different forms, depending on the aspirations of the devotee. The only fundamental standpoint is that of love in one form or another, and that is why it is probably better to say that the essence of *bhakti* consists in the dedication and total consecration to the Lord on behalf of the *bhakta*, rather than speculation on both love and the Beloved. Praxis is primordial.

The history of King Ambarīśa clearly illustrates the spirit of *bhakti*: the king was about to break his three days of fasting, which he had imposed upon himself to crown a year of spiritual disciplines, when the sage Durvasa, who had been well known for his harsh temper on other occasions, appeared at his table. The most elemental hospitality demanded respect and honor toward guests. On accepting the king's invitation Durvasa went to the banks of the river Kalindi to do his dutiful ablutions. When they had been carried out, the good sage fell into deep meditation. Time went by, and the king knew that if he did not break his fast within a specific amount of time, all the good works of that year, which he had vowed upon, would come to no effect. On the other hand, neither could he commit the offense of not waiting for his guest. His answer was to only drink a little water.

When Durvasa returned, he interpreted the king's impatience as an abominable offense, and he put a curse on him. The curse took on the form of a demon that threatened to devour the king, yet his tranquility and appeasement left the demon powerless. The malignant spirit, seeing its onslaught to be discouraged by its prey, turned its wrath upon Durvasa himself. The latter rapidly escaped, and realizing that he could not hold out against the demon for much time, he went in search of the God Brahma and then in turn Śiva, but without any result, since these Gods could not help him against an offense committed upon a devotee of Viṣṇu, Lord of the universe. In the end he succeeded in reaching Viṣṇu himself, who told him, "I am also incapable of helping you, since you have offended someone who loves me. I love my devotees and I am but a voluntary slave to my love. How could it be any other way, since those who love me sacrifice absolutely everything in my honor and for me? They have totally consecrated themselves to me. When someone lays a curse on those who love me, the curse will revert even more strongly against them. There is solely one person who can save you from the curse. Go to the one you have offended with your curse and ask forgiveness. This is the only way to save yourself. Go immediately and I wish you well."

¹⁶² That which the believer believes "to believe" and not what the external observer "believes" to see. See Panikkar (2003/XLVII), pp. 69–72.

¹⁶³ On the subject of iconolatry, see Panikkar (1998/XXIII).

With there being no other solution, the sage humbly set off in search of the king to plead forgiveness. Ambariṣa offered him due respect and freely pardoned him, and afterward, to enable counteracting the spell and free Durvasa from it, the king recited this prayer in offering:

"Oh Lord, your infinite power exists in all things.
 You are in fire; you are in the sun,
 You are in the moon; You are in the stars,
 You are in the water; You are in the earth,
 You are in the ether; You are in the wind,
 You are in the subtle elements of the universe,
 Save and protect Durvasa with Your all-loving power,
 May all of us find Your peace!"
 And thus, Durvasa found peace of heart and was cleansed of all defilement.¹⁶⁴

Theandrical Love

Love is a path, *mārga*, is truly a yoke, *yoga*: is both things at the same time. As a path it must be surpassed, gone beyond, since the path leads to the end, at which time the path lies behind, is trodden upon and then abandoned. *Bhakti-mārga* is a path of salvation, and it unites us with God. Yet, furthermore, it is *Bhakti-yoga*, that is to say, love that unites and bonds, and as such does not vanish, on the contrary, it is reinforced, since the greater the love, the stronger the bond.

If, from the theoretical viewpoint, many "Indologists" have often considered *gnōsis* as a superior path, from the practical point of view, love retains primacy, not only in popular religiosity, but also in the most elaborated theological religiosity—a love, however, that has renounced the very concept of love and the very feeling of love.

The spirituality of love in India has two great inclinations, which could be known as naked love and the nakedness of love.

The former, *naked love*, is that *bhakti* that solely aspires to God and as such abandons and leaves everything else to one side without paying it further attention; this is pure love that only yearns to be united with God and is prepared to renounce everything for Him, even love itself; this is the grace of love, and as such, having left all concept and all form, coincides with *jñāna-mārga* and becomes the element that is found in the strictest *Vedānta*. The fact noted so many times that *bhakti* is not considered to be incompatible with *jñāna* precisely comes from the renunciation of any sheathing or cladding of love by love. This *bhakti* is purely scatological and without commitment. It would be something like the existential dimension corresponding to the path of knowledge.

In contrast, the *nakedness of love* represents the other aspect of *bhakti-mārga*. It is strictly speaking the loving dimension where everything is transformed into love, and because of this, everything is renounced, and in truth nothing is renounced, since it is regained as soon as the loving core within all things is discovered. Everything has been transformed to love and, as such, nothing has to be abandoned, but rather everything is purified by being burned in the fire of love. This is really and truly *bhakti*. Its best example is human love as the epiphany of divine love.

Very rightly so, it has been pointed out that, due to the influence of what we have named second-generation Indologists, *bhakti* spirituality has been relegated to the back-

¹⁶⁴ *BhagP* X.29.1ff.

ground.¹⁶⁵ Equally rightly the cause is attributed to the popularity of the *Vedānta*, above all in academic studies. But it is not so right to say that the *advaita* is to be identified with intellectualist monism. There must be a distinction between monism and *advaita*, as we have already indicated. The a-duality of the *advaita* does not exclude *bhakti*.¹⁶⁶

Perhaps there is no other place where this characteristic of Hindū *dharma* is seen as clearly as in this third path of love. Everything we have described up until now about divine love can be applied to “human love.” Better said, there is no separation. We must be able to see the difference between them, yet we cannot divide them except in our mind, which then destroys the purity of both: turning “divine love” into illusion (a projection of reason) and “human love” into lust (a mere egotistical desire). It is not that *bhakti* mysticism uses erotic language to ascend to divine love. There are not two loves. A disembodied love cannot be a path to salvation for a corporal being, which is man. Merely sensual love never liberates those who are fundamentally *cit* (intelligence). Furthermore, love that does not transcend body and soul does not reach the mansion of *Īśvara* (God), and as such it will not unite us with Him, it will not save us.

This could serve as an epitome of *bhakti* spirituality according to the Tamil tradition.¹⁶⁷ But we also read in the traditional *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*:

“Those who have a balanced mind, profound understanding and are expert at yoga can see me in the human body, which is where I am fully manifested with all my qualities.”¹⁶⁸

Because of this, the Lord says that among all entities of creation the human body is His favorite dwelling.¹⁶⁹ Yet this human body, the mansion of Divinity, is inseparable from the *ātman*, as the following legend relates to us:

Piṅgala was a courtesan in the city of Videha. One day, looking very attractive, she was standing in her finery in the doorway of her house waiting for the richest client who could satisfy her economic wants. And so she allowed one possible client after another to pass by, constantly in the hope of wealthier pretenders, until there came a time when no one crossed her path and she lost all hope of catching her prey. After her primal feeling of dismay, she suddenly felt a “joyous dismay”: she became aware that only the divine *ātman* could fulfill the desire for wealth, peace, and happiness. . . .¹⁷⁰

Hence, only a pure heart can find salvation in human love.

It is this pure love, in which there is no split between the material and spiritual worlds, that *bhakti* describes.¹⁷¹ Kṛṣṇa is evidently its main symbol, the playful God, the God of

¹⁶⁵ See Dhavamony (1971).

¹⁶⁶ See Panikkar (2000/XXVII), pp. 275–85.

¹⁶⁷ The *Tattvatrayam* by Pillai Lokacarya distinguishes between three classes of entities (*tattva*): *cit* (consciousness: humankind [*ātman*], *acit* (that which is incognoscible: matter), and *Īśvara* (the Divinity). See Amaladass (1995) in his version of the commentary of the quoted work in another renowned Tamil classic: the *Tattvatrayavyakhyanam* di Maṇavaḷamamuni.

¹⁶⁸ *Bhagavatan* II.21.

¹⁶⁹ *Bhagavatan* II.22.

¹⁷⁰ *Bhagavatan* III.22–44.

¹⁷¹ There is an immense bibliography on the subject. For a recent example, see Hopkins (2002).

theandrical love.¹⁷² One can play with *Kṛṣṇa*, one can feel all amorous corporal passion, the intimacy of all true lovers is accomplished, and all fears are overcome.¹⁷³

"Bel Amor"

One fundamental aspect of *bhakti* is beauty. Love is beautiful, and the object of love is beautiful. Perhaps for this reason the symbol of divinity is both masculine and feminine, and the most popular Gods of Hindū *dharma* have their corresponding Goddesses not in the least inferior to their male counterparts. Beauty is bipolar: feminine and masculine, and "lovers of God," have to discover their own complementary dimension within the Divinity.

The experience of beauty cannot be separated from the experience of God, lest it be transformed into an intellectual lubrication. Because of this, love in play and play in love is a basic intuition of Hindū spirituality: creation is one of Divinity's games.¹⁷⁴ The game has no other aim than pure delight in itself; when it is play it is not competition.

One classical text from one of the most ancient *Āgama* (probably from before Christ),¹⁷⁵ and the most authoritative one in the *Sivaism* of Kashmir, tells us,

When one listens with concentrated attention to long sustained sounds from stringed or other kinds of musical instruments, then, one becomes identified with supreme reality (*para-vyoman*).¹⁷⁶

If many other texts from *tantra* and other schools put stress upon pleasure and happiness, *tantra*, among others, speaks to us of the aesthetic experience. We are dealing with something more than musical ecstasy.¹⁷⁷ It concerns the experience in our actual complete sensitivity, what I have named "cosmotheandrical intuition," which, in being supreme, surpasses any sensible, intellectual, and spiritual content; that is why it is known as coming from the *void*—paradoxically.

Beauty is inseparable from the senses, and these in turn from the human body. The path of love is a path of beauty. And beauty has to be, although not exclusively, sensitive and corporal. The great works of art in India, especially the temples, are not built for "the glory of God," as homage from the creature to the creator, but rather for the very salvation of humanity, for the contemplation of beauty.¹⁷⁸ The split between Dionysus and Apollo has been fatal

¹⁷² See Dimock & Levertov (1967), along with a select bibliography in Wilson (1875).

¹⁷³ We could adduce that the spiritual betrothals of some mystics in Christian spirituality is a homomorphic equivalent. It is significant to observe the recent appearance of works about *Kṛṣṇa* and Christ from both Christian and Hindū sources, although as far as I can see they lack the audacity of nuptial mysticism. Perhaps we know too much psychology. See esp. Bhaktipada (1985); Vempey (1988); Venkatesananda (1983).

¹⁷⁴ See Bäumert (1969).

¹⁷⁵ According to Silburn (1961), p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ *Vijñāna Bhairava* 41. See translations by Silburn (1961) and Bäumert (2003b). See also 73.

¹⁷⁷ Bäumert (2003b) translates "firmament suprême" [supreme heaven] by Silburn (1961) as "höchster Raum des Bewusstseins" [the highest space of consciousness]—which here is translated "supreme reality." Here we must abstain from an exegesis of this important text. We recommend the commentaries of these two authors.

¹⁷⁸ We are not far from classic Greece. See Plotinus who says: "where would Being (*ousia*) be if we deprived him from being beautiful (*kalon*)? If Being were deprived from beauty it would disap-

for the Mediterranean world. Buddha's middle path and the just measure of Aristotle have been the (difficult) teachings of the great sages.

This section may seem a little abstract for the average reader who has no need to be an expert in philosophy, but so often is religion reduced to morality, spirituality to praxis, and comparison to caricatures (on both sides), that I consider this reflection to be important.

The Harmony between the Three Paths

We have already indicated at the beginning of this third part that the three paths are in fact three routes that lead to different peaks, which, without becoming confused, are for their pilgrims the supreme heights that allow enjoyment of a common horizon of the vales and plains of reality. If the paths are different and the peaks cannot be confused, the vision nonetheless is the same. To state that there is only one peak is just as inappropriate as saying there are several peaks; simply, keeping to the metaphor, from one peak the other peaks can be seen when our vision is experiential. The peaks are different for our feet when we tread them; they are harmonious to our eyes when we contemplate their beauty. If we do not look down, and we have rested from the fatigue of our ascent, so that we can see how they point toward heaven, the peaks are neither the same nor different: they are *unique*.

Uniqueness is not unity. There is not only one peak. The peaks are unique, and for those who have climbed one of them, they are noncomparable. The influx into one's experience of uniqueness in terms of noncomparability is the experience of love, inseparable from beauty. Truth and goodness have their degrees or levels, insofar as they more or less approach objective models of Truth and Goodness. There are no levels or degrees of beauty because beauty has no objective models, which doesn't mean that it is purely subjective: it is an experience that embraces both the object and subject. That is why it has no reference outside of itself. Yet to discover the unicity in the sense of *uniqueness*, of each peak in our example, one must love (it). Love excludes comparison. Comparison is the work of the intellect and not of love. There are many children better than our own, and parents who love their offspring want them to have the best, to be virtuous, intelligent, healthy, and so on and so forth, just as for any other children. But they want it for their own children. It is love that discovers uniqueness without being blind to diversity.

The three paths are different yet they are unique to every pilgrim. From the outside we could call them homomorphic equivalents: if we follow them faithfully, to continue with the metaphor, they will lead us to the peak, to the one and only heaven. Discovering this equivalence is the purpose of the philosophical meditation of this fourth chapter.¹⁷⁹

Transcendentals

India has the fame of being the country of mysticism par excellence. Yet the mystical vision can be the fruit of a predominantly sensual, intellectual, or amorous experience. What we understand by mystical vision here is the complete experience of reality. But the interpretation of this experience could give priority to sensual, intelligible, or spiritual data.¹⁸⁰ The

pear," *Ænead* V,8,9 (39s.). Re India cf., among many other works, Delahoutre (1996), K. Fischer (1987), Lyle (1992).

¹⁷⁹ We are obliged here to insert this less descriptive and more philosophical chapter because it seems essential to us to provide a deeper understanding of Hindū dharma and not reduce it to simple morality.

¹⁸⁰ See Panikkar, *Opera Omnia*, I.1.

interpretation of this priority has led to the assumption that all is matter, all is consciousness, or all is spirit. These are monist interpretations of reality. When human beings discover that they are interpreting experience via their intellect and realize that this cannot be reduced to just one nondifferentiated Sameness, the dual vision of reality will emerge; there are material contents and spiritual entities and one cannot be reduced to the other. But human intellect cannot turn its back upon the search for the link between them. Then out of this intellectual effort spring two plausible attitudes: qualified dualism and qualified monism. The West has tended toward qualified dualism (creation is real, but it depends on a God, an absolute Being), whereas a large proportion of the East has inclined toward qualified monism (the world is apparently real only insofar as we remain ignorant).

But there is a third option, which has been more or less latent throughout the mysticism of all time. In this option, the interpretation is not registered in the mind, hence giving priority to senses (qualified dualism), nor by the intellect, putting its trust in itself (qualified monism). This is the third option, that of the specifically mystical sense, or the third eye as it is known in many traditions. When this third eye is in operation in its own right, what appears are what are known as the mysticisms that deny the world and human life. When this vision does not become divorced from the corporal senses or the intellectual sense, that is, when all three eyes are awake, interpretation reveals the irreducibility of reality both in dealing with the material alone as with the intellect alone. Not everything is *cit* nor is it *acit*, going back to the already quoted treatise.¹⁸¹ Not everything is material (unconscious), not everything is intellect (conscious): there is also a third dimension. This vision discovers that, in spite of not being able to reduce everything to oneness, there is no duality either: neither dualism nor monism. If we apply dialectic thinking to this double negation we are faced with a contradiction: it is neither one nor is it not-one (since two is identified with not-one). Yet we can overcome the dialectics. This is the *advaita* we have mentioned so many times. At this point we could fall back on a word, harmony, which Pythagoras apparently introduced into Greek thinking, although later it fell into philosophical disuse¹⁸² with some exceptions.¹⁸³ Harmony would be the homomorphic equivalent of the *advaita*, as we shall see. It is the experience of the *nirvāṇa* or the overcoming of all the *dvandva*, of all contraries, of all duality—without, on the other hand, slipping into monism. As opposites, the *dvandva* appear as contradictory concepts only to reason, for example, hot and cold, pain and joy (to give two classical examples). In reality they are opposites but only conceptually contradictory.¹⁸⁴

All this is tantamount to saying that the Hindū mind does not rest until it encounters the relationality among all things—without forgetting that this is also a feature of the human spirit in general. To be able to find this harmony, it must be sought in the identity of all things, not in their equality. And to find this identity one must dive deep into the innerness, just as an already quoted passage from the Upaniṣad mentioned, and again we find ourselves with the *svadharma* of Hinduism, in its ontological and not solely moral meaning.

Getting back to the subject, the above-mentioned three *mārga* represent the three paths that lead to the heights of salvation, where Truth, Beauty, and Goodness coincide in

¹⁸¹ See note 150.

¹⁸² Most philosophical dictionaries hardly mention the word except in relation to music.

¹⁸³ See the great work of Kepler under the title of *Harmonices mundi libri V* (1619). We must also remember "Pre-established harmony" by Leibniz, etc.

¹⁸⁴ In Sanskrit literature, *nirvāṇa* quite often means indifferent to dilemmas, indifferent to alternatives. See Glossary.

their Harmony, indeed a Harmony that transcends the classical transcendentals as a sort of transcendental of transcendentals.¹⁸⁵

These three paths of Hindū spirituality are, in reality, three methods, in the primal sense of the word, “paths” that lead us to the end—whether they are the *same* or not, going beyond what different philosophers take as *sameness*. Nonetheless, they are not three watertight and exclusive compartments. Travelers on their ascent greet each other on the way; they exchange gifts and provisions and, occasionally, even change paths—although sometimes they may squabble among themselves. When all is said and done, the attraction of the goal is what conditions and inspires all the different paths. The ascension leads us to the depths of our heart. The goal is not the peaks but rather a heaven that transcends all of them and a wind that envelops all of them. The goal, for the very fact of being transcendent, is immanently encountered in some way or another in each of the paths that lead to it. No one would search for the goal, nor would they even initiate the path, if the end were not there right from the beginning, attracting from above and also pushing from within. The *Brahmasūtra* states: the aspiration toward *brahman* stems from *brahman* itself.¹⁸⁶ It is contemporary competitive culture that has infected even thinking, by making it competitive, and where there is competition there is no love. We should not forget that we are talking about spirituality.¹⁸⁷

Since the times of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, some twenty-five centuries ago, this harmony has been proclaimed, considering the three *mārga* to be three kinds of yoga, that is to say, interpreting the three paths all entwined together as one, uniting (“yoking”) man with the Divine—to use that term.

In effect, the *Gītā* tells us that the path of action is indispensable and that no one can forgo it; more than that, that it is impossible to remain totally inactive.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, accomplishments on their own do not lead to the goal.¹⁸⁹ Devotion is necessary,¹⁹⁰ but it is inefficient if it is not accompanied by wisdom,¹⁹¹ and more so if the latter is not linked to sacrifice,¹⁹² since true knowledge is not just a simple intellectual operation but rather the sacrifice of the intellect.¹⁹³ Here it would be convenient to mention the work of Jñānesvar, the great mystic from Maharashtra who, in the thirteenth century at the age of eighteen, composed a *Gītā* consisting of nine thousand verses, in which the harmony of the three paths is integrated, brought together in nonmonist *advaita* (a-dualism).¹⁹⁴ This is an outstanding work of Hindū spirituality, little known outside Marathi literature.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁵ See Zubiri (1998). To dialogue with the West we employ the Aristotelian-Scholastic view of transcendentals.

¹⁸⁶ *BS* I.1.1–4.

¹⁸⁷ We have stated that one of the meanings of the word *nirduandva* is indifference toward alternatives, not confusing them with logical dilemmas. The *alter-native* is not necessarily the counterposition of two *aliud*, but rather the consciousness of two *alter*, the *altera pars* of everything (of the other).

¹⁸⁸ See *BG* III.4.2.

¹⁸⁹ *BG* IV.14ff.

¹⁹⁰ *BG* IX.31.

¹⁹¹ *BG* IX.10.

¹⁹² *BG* III.9; IV.23, etc.

¹⁹³ *BG* IX.15.

¹⁹⁴ He died in 1296 when he was twenty-one; there is no unanimity on the exact dates, but if he was born in 1271 he would have been twenty-five. But his probable date of birth was 1275.

¹⁹⁵ See in Spanish Gñānēshvar (1994). His most important work is *Jñāneshwari*; see also a translation into English by Jñāneshwari (1995) and the study, with an anthology of texts, by Machado (1998).

A certain intellectualist interpretation of the *Vedānta* has considered these three paths as three consecutive stages, something in the fashion of the three classical ages of inner life of Christian scholasticism: the purgative way, the illuminative way, and the unitive way—in other words, as steps in which, while the previous one always remains beneath the one now ascended, all are gradually and progressively conquered. According to this Vedantic version, the order would be action, devotion, and knowledge. Those who “love” have no need to act, and those who “know” are rendered free of action and devotion. The a-cosmic *saṁnyāsin* have abandoned all forms of worship and eliminated all affection. To justify this ordering they have recourse to the three previously mentioned classical qualities (*guṇa*). In this way, a particular path would correspond to each anthropological type. A great amount of contemplation is not expected of a tamasic human being, nor is much action expected from someone who is sattvic. Hence, everyone is happy, each one in their slot. This interpretation avoids competition, but it also precludes stimulus, it is a little forced, and perhaps corresponds to a phase in Hinduism influenced by a certain interpretation of caste. Each caste has its sociological function but also its anthropological goal.

The classical Hindū attitude is more unitarian. It is important not to confuse *union* with oneness—hence *bhakti*’s healthy correction of *jñāna*. Oneness taken to its extreme can lead to monism. Highly intellectualized union may lead us to slide into dualism. The commitment that we have with *karman* can make us descend into activism if it is not at the same time conscious and loving. One does Good, one knows Truth, one loves Beauty, but only when one lives in an a-dual experience is human life not fragmented. It is here where the primacy of Harmony appears to rise above the other transcendentals. In other words, the key factor seems to reside in the *advaita* intuition of Harmony. What so many Western thinkers have termed Super-one, Super-being, or other similar expressions, homomorphically corresponds to the *advaita* or a-dual vision of reality.

To get more familiar with the dominant trains of thought on the issue, first we shall seek to use traditional language of the One before going any further on the subject of Harmony.

The Mysticism of the One

The transcendental priority of One, the vision of the Absolute as One, the pure and ineffable unicity of That whose least inappropriate denomination would be “One without a second,”¹⁹⁶ is a characteristic of the human mind and a fundamental concept in Hinduism. This also explains the inner oneness of the triple path of salvation, without necessity of more or less contrived graduations. This primacy will also provide us with a convincing explanation of specifically Hindū tolerance.¹⁹⁷

I would personally like to express my philosophical reserve regarding the Absolute (insofar as it seems to exclude any relation); yet since ancient times, under various names, this word has served as a symbol to express the ultimate reality—and it is used in this sense in the following pages. One should learn to speak more than one language.

It is significant that if a large part of Indic thought describes the Absolute as the “One without a second,” a similarly large part of Western thinking describes it as the “Other without an equal.” India would say that the Absolute is not the “Other” but rather the “One.” The “Other” can only be so by taking myself as a point of reference. To call God the “Other” is

¹⁹⁶ See *CUVI.2.1*.

¹⁹⁷ See earlier in this volume on tolerance.

to name Him in terms of the creature, and as such the very order of things would demand the inversion of perspective, the con-version of our mind. In any case, the “other” would be the contingent being, but never God. The “Other” (God) is pure Transcendence—although there is a need of accepting its Immanence (within us) to be able to speak of it. The “One” (*Brahman*) is pure Immanence—although there is a need to recognize its Transcendence for our language to have any meaning.

Precisely because neither the Self, nor Truth, nor Goodness, nor Beauty are the ultimate and absolute, although *quoad nos* (as far as we are concerned) they coincide with it, there can be a plurality of paths and a true equivalence between them. There we have the ontological foundation of the widely debated issue of religious “pluralism” hovering in the background—although we should have to introduce distinctions that are not our concern here. If Being were “before” Truth or “prior to” Goodness, to give an example, whoever attained Being would so to speak reach deeper into the core of the Absolute than those who realize it as Truth or Goodness. But this is not so because all the transcendentals are equal to the Absolute, although different among themselves; they are equivalent because they are “aspects” of the *one* absolute.

Where is the source of the One’s dialectic priority over the rest of the transcendentals? If we were to answer this correctly, it would not only help us to understand the issue we are dealing with, but also many of the aporias that the West, the spiritual offspring of Hellenism, has always found in Hinduism—and along with this, help to correct the misunderstanding that, since the beginning, has come to prevail in the cultural and religious encounter between Hinduism and Christianity. This does not mean that the mysticism of One is unknown in the West.¹⁹⁸ In general, what has happened is that it has been widespread but tacit because of the inner dread of monism-panteism found in monotheistic religions—in the final analysis due to the fact that neither trinitarian thinking nor the *advaita*, for many different reasons, have penetrated into the mainstream of monotheist civilizations.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions that confirm the rule, not only in the Greek but also in the Christian world.¹⁹⁹ We should also consider Nicholas of Cusa, for instance, who seemed to know the curious medieval etymology that identified the One with the Self by deriving the *one* from the *entity*.²⁰⁰ Yet it is the same authority who, basing himself on Proclus, gives priority to the One to such an extent that the One carries more weight than Being²⁰¹—as disciples of Plato state in contrast to the disciples of Aristotle.²⁰²

The One shows its priority with respect to the other transcendentals owing to its triple peculiarity: (a) It is better at preserving its transcendence, (b) it is better at defending its infinity, (c) it is more all-encompassing than Being.

¹⁹⁸ See esp. Plotinus speaking of the One as the principle that transcends Being. The *Ænead* V.10, and also VI.9.3 (along with, esp., III.7.6). See moreover the commentary by Meister Eckhart on the biblical text “In die illa erit Dominus unus, et erit nomen eius Unum” (*Zech* 14:9) and all his metaphysics on unity in the Thomist tradition.

¹⁹⁹ See, for instance, the brilliant defense of Pico della Mirandola, who was accused of being a pantheist, in the scholarly work by Lubac (1974), especially the masterly study on the *De ente et uno* by the count of Mirandola and Concordia.

²⁰⁰ “Unitas quasi *ontitas* ab *on* *græco*, id est *entitas*” [unity as *ontity* from Greek *on*, that is, entity]. This phrase comes from Theodore de Chartres, *Comment in Boeth. de Trinitate*, accepted and repeated by Nicholas of Cusa in *De docta ignorantia*, I.8, and *De venatione sapientie* 24.

²⁰¹ “Capacius est igitur unum quam ens” (*De venatione sapientie* 21). The reason (contra Aristotle) is clear: the self is only so in the act; the one holds all that is possible.

²⁰² The ancient classical discussion, which came very alive during the Renaissance. See Lubac (1974).

Needless to say that any reflection on transcendentals, as extremely general notions that allow themselves to be applied to all reality, cannot admit a strictly apodictic argumentation since they, the transcendentals, do not have any reference point outside themselves. Here, thought has to be moved by suggestion and plausibility.

The One Is Better at Preserving Its Transcendence

Truth and Goodness, as much as Beauty, possess such a charge of worldliness and creaturability in their human categories that this is difficult to shake off, even if, when applying them to the Absolute, they are purified to a maximum of their creatural connotations. The same happens with Self. However much one seeks to purify it, the shadow of beings affects the Self so much that as the actual history of Western philosophy abundantly proves, only a few thinkers have been able to totally purge Being from beings.²⁰³ Perhaps the intuition is ultimately the same, but when the conceptual scaffolding is not adequate, the effort is greatly increased so that sometimes it becomes all but impossible to get to the crux of the matter.²⁰⁴ Within our sublunar experience we are encountered with the Self, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. The leap involved in applying this to the Absolute would indeed allow us to know it in our own way, but the dimension of mystery and ineffability would suffer because of the excessive categorical load of our conceptuality. We could speak of meta-truth, of super-being, extreme beauty, and ultra-good, but their points of reference continue being our respective concepts of Truth, Self, Beauty, and Goodness. Although these transcendentals are transcendentals and cannot be isolated, something in them renders them complete in our experience. For instance, in the aesthetic experience, nothing can be added to some of the works of Michelangelo, of Zurbarán, or of Beethoven. They are complete. In contrast, there is nothing upon this Earth that is fully One; the perfect unit does not exist. The unstoppable temporal flow of our own thought prevents us from intellectually grasping the "One without Two." The One thought in this instant already has a second moment when it is written. To give the name of One to the Absolute would be to give it a name unknown in the realm of multiplicity. Here we have a text among thousands on the same:

"The only reality here [after becoming illuminated] is the One—oh Achyuta!—There is nothing apart from Him, nothing different [from Him]. He is I, and He is you. Then, renounce the illusion of plurality. And thus instructed [by the guru Ribhu], the king acquired the vision of supreme reality and renounced plurality."

Another translation has it that

"This One, which here is all things, is Achyuta [Viṣṇu]; outside [other] of which there is nothing: he is I; he is you; yet he is everything: this universe is in his form. Abandon the error of differences."²⁰⁵

²⁰³ See, by way of example and only as a point of reference for our discussion, the important studies by Gilson (1962; 2001). See also Panikkar (1999/XIX).

²⁰⁴ The work of Martin Heidegger is pragmatic here. He had to create a language to express his intuitions.

²⁰⁵ *ViṣṇuP* II.16.23–24.

Our concept of the unit is a logical, quantitative concept, totally inefficient and inapplicable to the Absolute. The One is not a number. Abstraction is necessary to obtain any concept, but in this case abstraction becomes annihilating extraction. We are not abstracting a series of aspects of reality to be left with a formal concept, but rather extracting the very reality from the One if we take away its oneness. I can abstract a color from something, the truth from a statement, the moral aspect from an action, but the thing, the statement, and the action remain. If we abstract the entity from the Being we are left with Being; if we take the Self away from the Being we are left with nothingness, an absence of Being that can only identify itself with the Non-self, with Non-being. If we take away the One from One we are left with No-one, which has no meaning as it is intrinsically contradictory. I cannot take away anything from the One without destroying it. We are dealing with an inaccessible unit-identity for human thought and totally different from the anthropocentric ambience. In a nutshell, the One maintains the transcendence of "God," of the Absolute, better than any other transcendental.

The One Is Better at Defending Its Infinity

On the other hand, infinity would never come across a better bulwark than the One. In fact, unlike the other transcendentals, the One has no opposite that could contradict it without that in itself being a contradiction, as we have said. The Not-being reveals to us an absence, Not-truth is error, Not-good is evil, Not-beauty is ugliness, although their respective concepts are not on the same level. In contrast, the Not-one is not like the Not-being, which even without Being still possesses a kind of reality not covered by Being. In contrast, the Not-one is contradictory to what it contradicts, since it has no "second" from where it can be negated. To deny the One presupposes the One denying itself while it is being contradicted. A part of the One cannot be denied because the One has no parts, and thus that which is denied is not the One. As such the *ekam advitīyam* One without two (without a second) to which we have constantly been referring should not be translated as "nonduality," but rather as *a-duality, a-dvaita*.

Good is opposed to Evil. It is true that they are not on the same level, but nevertheless it is still an injury, an opponent of Good. Moreover, the tree of science is always made up of good and bad.²⁰⁶ Could humanity know Good if there were no Bad? The Absolute is totally good, yet such a statement (as it stands) would mean nothing if it were not contrasted with evil. We could say something similar with regard to Beauty.²⁰⁷

Something similar happens with Truth. This is its lack of error, and its definition by its opposition to error. Truth is what there is that is positive, and error is what there is that is merely negative. Error, like evil itself, perhaps does not exist, but the deformation of the Truth is still real in the experiencing of the subject's ignorance. The limit of Truth is error, and although when the concept is applied to the Absolute any limitation is eliminated, the contingent charge of the original concept of Truth from which we departed is greater than the One concept, which has no relationship with our intellect, feelings, or our mind, but rather with itself. This is the difference.

The fact that the One cannot be denied gives it precedence over all other transcendentals. Logic can stand its ground and answer back. Thought can deny Truth, Goodness, and

²⁰⁶ See Gn 2:17, although the phrase is probably a simple Semitism.

²⁰⁷ Perhaps it is no coincidence that the most recent generation of Christians in India, influenced by Hindū spirituality, have discovered the importance of aesthetic thought. See Amaladass (2002).

Beauty, and the negation, as negation, has a meaning. The Being, on the other hand, here constitutes a special case. Thought cannot deny the Being, except if we accept the Western dogma formulated by Parmenides on the identity between the Being and Thought. If they are identical, Thought that denies the Being is the same as the Being denying the Being, thereby leading to a contradiction. That is to say, the Being denies itself to itself, something that has no meaning, since it, the Being, is being assumed in its own negation. Only if Parmenides is obviated or overridden (and this is done by a large mass of Indian thought) does talking about Nothingness—as absence of Being—make any sense. Thus, the (especially Asian) philosophy of the Void does not come under Hegel's logic.²⁰⁸ In a word, in this way, the Being can be denied without slipping into contradiction. With the One, something different happens. The negation of the One has no meaning at all because we assume it exists when we deny it. Said in a more simple fashion, the One is infinite and there is no place to "grasp it." My very thought is that One cannot think it is Not-one—since it needs to be One to think itself as Not-one. Do not not say that you can think you are not two (which is not the same as one): two is the sum of two units and already presupposes the One.

*The One Neither Is nor Is It Not
(It Is More All-Inclusive Than the Being)*

The great audacity of Indic culture, and of Oriental cultures in general, consists in their resistance to idolization of the Being, its persistence in not wanting to identify the Being with the Absolute. It is not the philosophy of the Being, as is Greek philosophy and its descendants, from Parmenides through to Hegel. This is a fundamental difference—and because of this we shall take the time to enlarge upon the issue. In the beginning there was no Being nor was there Not-Being, chants the Vedic hymn of creation.²⁰⁹ Some say the Not-Being was alone was neither Being nor Not-Being, but it was not Being and not Not-Being at the same time either.²¹⁰ Neither did it exist nor did it not exist.²¹¹ The supreme Beginning (Principle?) cannot be adequately expressed in terms of existence.²¹² For this very same reason, it cannot properly be said that *brahman* exists, but saying this does not mean denying *brahman*'s reality; on the contrary, absolutely everything is attributed to *brahman*, without any limitation.²¹³

It is always for the same reason that India resists identifying the Being with the Absolute so as not to limit it. We shall quote just one example:

"And why should they not worship Thee, oh *Mahātman*, Thou who art greater than *Brahman*, Thou, the original creator: infinite lord of the Gods and in whom the universe rests? Thou, who art imperishable, the Being and the Not-Being and whatever lies beyond both. Thou art the original God, the primordial Person, the supreme refuge of this universe. Thou art the cogniscent and who should be known, the ultimate end. The world is penetrated by Thee, Oh Thou, infinite form!"²¹⁴

²⁰⁸ There is now a systematic study in Spanish on the celebrated "Kyoto school" that represents a contemporary example of this. I am referring to Heisig (2002).

²⁰⁹ *RV* X.129.1.

²¹⁰ *Sub* U.I.1; II.1.

²¹¹ *Sub* U.IV.18; *SB* X.5.1.

²¹² *BG* XIII.12.

²¹³ See Panikkar (1961/3).

²¹⁴ *Gītā* XI.37–38. R. C. Zaehner in his translation criticizes many current versions. The text is

Indeed, the Being is limited, even though only conceptually, by the Not-Being. It is obvious that they are not both on the same plane, yet it is just as true that the Nothingness is at least dialectically necessary, so that the Being can affirm itself as itself. The created being is as such because it has emerged from the Nothingness and remains outside, it ex-ists because it is dis-tended *extra causas*, outside its cause. All this cannot be said for the Absolute, but consequently neither can it be declared that it is Being if all real references to the Nothingness are eliminated. If the Absolute is the Cause of beings (which are different to it), it itself cannot be its own cause, as it must be different to what is caused. The notion of *causa sui* is contradictory. The analogy between them gets us out of a tight spot, but it does not solve the problem. It is said that the Nothingness is counterpoised to Being-existence, but not to Being-essence. The being-essence of a specific "thing" can definitely be thought without any reference to the Nothingness, but total and universal Being-essence means the same as the essence of Being, and this, apart from not having real meaning if it is separated from Existence, once again gets on the dialectic horns of necessary limitation: since "that" is what the Being is, it again presents a constituent reference of what is-not. In short, Being applied to the Absolute does not escape stating its relation to beings (as the term itself connotes) and the Nothingness (as "that" which "allows" them to be). Which suffices to indicate that this Being as such cannot be *the* characteristic of the Absolute, of the Independent and Ineffable. Being is Being for beings, in itself it does not have to be Being, although our thought may be found there without a path.²¹⁵

Let it be understood that we are not denying that it can be said that God is Being, but simply that the Being as such is the last possible characterization of the Absolute. The deification of the Being is so intimately linked to the philosophical and theological culture of the Christian West that it makes it difficult to express in different terms and renders most delicate the act of distinguishing (much less separating) God from Being. Metaphysics (since it concerns an effort of intelligibility) can and perhaps even should consider God as Being. Religiosity, however, as an existential path toward the goal, does not allow itself to be reduced to intelligibility. Perhaps much of the direction taken by Western thought has played around with a certain premature identification between the God of Christianity and the *esse* of Philosophy.²¹⁶ Could this not be one of the reasons for the current worldwide thirst for spirituality (religiosity) liberated from the constraints of current religionism?

However this may be, the truth is that Hinduism has not pursued this identification any further. The latter has allowed itself to move freely in transcendent spheres and within their mystical expression. Nevertheless, this has taken its toll, since the price the Indians have paid has been that science and technology failed to emerge even at the peak of their culture.²¹⁷ Nonetheless, what is winning the world but losing life worth to humanity?²¹⁸ Perhaps Hinduism could offer the West redemption from this "*felix culpa*" (technology) that has become the common denominator of the predominant culture of our times.

deliciously ambiguous, and it is not up to us to provide an adequate exegesis. See *SU* II.5; III.7; V.1; VII; *IsU* 13; etc. for Upaniṣadic contexts.

²¹⁵ "Quoniam res divina prior estente et omnibus differentiis eius: est enim super ens et super unum" [Because the "divine" comes before the Self and all its differences; in fact it is a super-entity and a super-one], states Cayetanus, *Comm. in Summ. theologie*, l.q. 39.a.1. The echoes of Plotinus are obviously present here.

²¹⁶ See our observations on the interpretation of "Ego sum qui sum" from Ex 3:14 in Panikkar (1961/15). For a Buddhist viewpoint on the issue, see Panikkar (1999/XIX), pp. 187–89.

²¹⁷ See Panikkar (1961/11), pp. 182ff.

²¹⁸ See Mk 8:36.

The Weakness of the One

The One has precedence over the other transcendentals from the logical point of view, but reality is not exhaustively captured by logic. And this is the weakness of the One. If the Absolute is the One that has no Two or allows no Other, the great problem of Hindū spirituality is finding a place for man within this One. It is also true that the Being does not leave room for anything else, no other Being at its side, but at least it conceptually makes room for beings that, without being the Being, have "emanated" from It. The mysticism of the One, which has the undoubted advantage of guaranteeing ineffability and transcendence, finds itself in a position of disadvantage when it comes to safeguarding the rights of creatures, so to speak, but above all when it is a question of giving a map of nature to temporal beings. Dynamism is a constituent part of the mysticism of the Being. Thus beings are not the Being, yet they will be. From the point of view of the Being, the fact that they "will be" has no consistency or meaning, but for the beings that will be, it constitutes their only solace and foundation. For beings are as soon as they walk, as soon as they move toward Being. Only beings on the path can be talked about. Reached the goal, only the Being is.²¹⁹

The standpoint of the One does not allow such dynamism. It is useful to us at the point of arrival, but not for the journey. It is in the purest perspective once the goal is reached, yet it is so pure that it is invisible during the ascent. If the consistency of *beings* is retained as long as they are on the path toward the Being, as in themselves alone they have no substance whatsoever, the consistency (substance) that is not the One becomes much more problematic from this point of view. In fact, it cannot be said that the world is the Other, or that it is the multiple. As far as the One is concerned the Other has no meaning. But neither can the multiple maintain this relationship with respect to the One, because this cannot answer the question of what it is a multiple. Certainly not of One. The One will not allow itself to be multiplied. Neither can it be said that the multiplicity of events is the multiple of the Not-One. The One is so ineffable and infinite that it leaves room for nothing else. The dialectics of the One do not allow any multiplicity nor any unfolding. There is no possible becoming or dynamism. The One is beyond any contingency of change or multiplicity, of diversity or potentiality.²²⁰

Does this mean we have to reject the horizons of the mysticism of the One and by doing so we have proved the superiority of the approach via the Being? No, I don't think so. The lesson that emerges is, in the first place, one of positive symbiosis, of mutual corrective measures. A second consequence can be formulated by saying that the mysticism of the One is not the sphere of what is contingent and temporal, and that the mysticism of the One cannot be used to explain this world and its provenance. But this has already been renounced by the mysticism of the One since the very beginning, and there has been no interest in this problem, an issue that has always been seen as provisional and irrelevant. The vast pretension of the mysticism of the One inheres precisely in its not moving within the worldly sphere of the contingent, but rather installing itself in the Absolute and speaking from It, "*sub specie aeternitatis*," as some Western mystics would say. And yet the One does not admit perspectives. The One is beyond any other transcendental and resists any kind of reduction. The dialectics of reason are of no use here. Its pretension is not to provide us with another point of view, but rather to obviate the necessity and meaning of any point of view. Now there is no "point" and there

²¹⁹ Panikkar (1972/II), pp. 287ff.

²²⁰ Little by little, similar results have been reached in the West through Heidegger. See Bales (1983), pp. 197–208.

is no "view."²²¹ It is not concerned with giving us the "eternal vision" of temporal reality, or telling us how the world is seen *by* God; it does not set out to give any vision *ad extra* but rather it has the ambition of penetrating the very vision of God, not by the way of seeing "things," but rather insofar as it has left behind all object and sees "nothing," yet it *sees*.²²²

The Mysticism of the Advaita

As you may have observed, we have allowed ourselves to be led on by dialectical thinking in these latter pages, but human consciousness is neither exclusively dialectic, nor even purely rational. There is nonrational "evidence." This is the field of the *advaita*, which cannot be confused with either the mysticism of the Self or of the One.

We have sought to present the issue of the One in all its sinew, but the spirituality of India goes a step further: a bold step, which seems to us to represent the greatest originality within Hindū spirituality. In fact, it is not alone in taking this step; the same is true of the majority of Asiatic spiritualities, and the Trinity would also be another example. But these days the almost exclusive predominance of rationality has all but eliminated the practice of other faculties of man.

The classical name for the spirituality we are referring to is *advaita*, which, as its name indicates, cannot be confused with monism. Monism is pure rational logic; there the mysticism of the One rules. And this is the great challenge for the *advaita*, which does not deny rationality but rather transcends it. Owing to the cultural climate prevailing at the time of the first generations of Indologists, steeped in dialectic thought as they were, the term *advaita* is generally translated as nonduality, but in fact it ought to be translated as a-duality—as we have already seen. Indeed, the *advaita* is not negative, but rather privative; it is not the negation of "*dvaita*," of duality, but rather its absence. We are not in the dialectic frame of "*sic et non*" (of yes and no), but rather of the dialogic of the *meta-noia*, or the sphere of transcendence of what is mental—beyond *nous*, rational intelligibility—and not its negation. It does not involve denying duality but rather not slipping into it; without this constraint it would lead to monism. Monism is the great temptation of reason and its logical consequences. On the other hand, dualism is the great temptation of common sense and its practical consequences. The *advaita* intuition does not consist in affirming Oneness, or denying duality, but rather, with a vision that transcends intellect, it precisely recognizes the absence of duality in the crux of *one* reality where there is no duality; accordingly, it is not numerical since it does not have a two. Or rather, neither uniqueness nor duality correspond to the actual structure of reality.²²³ In other words, the *advaita* intuition sees the polarity of reality with priority accorded to the poles that constitute it; it is, as such, the primary vision of relationality. This alone is possible, without lapsing into nonrelationality, if the poles do not become substantive or reified and are seen in terms of their relationship, that is to say, as poles, but not as substances. It is not a rational vision that becomes possible only in the dialectic movement of the mind, which sees one pole first

²²¹ For instance *mādhyaṃika*, *vijñānavāda*, and a certain *vedānta* would be three systems that would thematically defend this position. See, as a simple example of this, Murri (1998).

²²² See Panikkar (2000/33).

²²³ Let us not forget that *dvitīyah* is an ordinal ("second"); it is not "two" (alongside One), but rather "second best." The a-dvaita would therefore be the One without a "second best"—nothing beside it. It cannot be said that it is alone, since this would mean that there should or could be a second. The absence of duality is not a *privatio* in the sense that it is missing something it should have.

and then the other immediately afterward. It is not a vision of rational intelligibility that requires the reduction of the object perceived's oneness (*reductio ad unum*). It is a state of consciousness in which one becomes aware of concatenation.²²⁴ The mother is seen as mother-of-the-daughter and not as a being who, years back, gave birth to another being; she is seen as the mother of the daughter and the daughter as the daughter of her mother and not as two beings who formerly had a very special relationship. Maternity and parentage are *seen* at the same time, simultaneously, since the former implies the latter. That is why we bend the grammar and say "is seen" and not "are seen." It is a two-directional relationship, yet it is one single relationship. The mother once given birth is not a mother; she has been that. Hence the *advaita* intuition is constitutionally dynamic and a-temporal: it does not allow itself to be fossilized thinking that which has been thought, a thought that has been thought. It is an experience and not a (rational) reflection upon it.

Texts that insist that reality is not One nor multiplicity, neither one nor two, neither Being nor Not-being, would seem to be irrational if they are examined with dialectic thought.²²⁵ They steer clear of the Scylla of monism without somehow running into the Charybdis of dualism. Here we have *advaita* wisdom. The One can still be acknowledged, yet a "One without a second,"²²⁶ and it is not counterpoised to duality. The absence of duality gives some flexibility to the One—because in fact it is neither one nor two. This is what we are referring to when we state that the *advaita* intuition transcends dialectic thought.

If reality is not reduced to Oneness or duality, *advaita* spirituality helps us to overcome the modern dichotomy between masculine and feminine. That which is masculine is what is not feminine and vice versa. There is no Śiva without Parvati, no God without Goddess, no male without female. They are not one, yet they are not two either. Reality is neither masculine nor feminine; it will not be reduced to monism. The consequences here are enormous and they impregnate the whole existence and extent of Hinduism—although in practice a sometimes cruel patriarchy has to be recognized, despite pockets of matriarchy in the North and the South.

The *advaita* represents the overcoming of dialectic thought because it means renunciation of rational intelligibility as the criterion of reality and of truth. Reality has no need to be intelligible without having to descend into irrationalism because of this. Duality is not denied (nondualism) but rather one is aware of the lack of such dualism (a-duality), which does not threaten Oneness, which is left free, so to say, nor does it deny duality. The *advaita* vision is not intelligible to the light of reason, but it is visible to the third eye's understanding, many philosophical schools would say; call it "the eye of faith," *anubhāva* or experience of that which is real, or any other name you please. We have said that dialectic thought of the past centuries in Europe translated *advaita* as nondualism; to be able to "perceive" absence (of dualism, in this case) the knowledge or awareness of love cannot be split. Solely when one loves does one perceive the absence (of the beloved).

The mysticism of Hinduism moves in this sphere. If sight is lost of this and one is presented with problems that are believed to have been overcome or are not of any interest, one cannot understand or establish any kind of fruitful dialogue. But we must return to our modest role of chronicler.

²²⁴ "Oculta concatenation," said Pico della Mirandola, *Opera omnia* (Basle, 1572), quoted by Lubac (1974).

²²⁵ See footnotes 177 to 183, among many other texts.

²²⁶ CU VI.2.1ff.

And so, the Oneness of the three *mārga* do not only reside in their ultimate goal but also in that they are more tendencies, tensions and aspirations than true paths or routes as etymology would suggest.²²⁷ They are paths in a peculiar sense in that they do not advance, but rather they only make obstacles disappear, giving the impression that they have been left behind as we have advanced, something similar to when we are in a train standing at a station and the train on the next track sets off in the opposite direction, making us feel as if it were we who were moving. Thus, it is not we that walk but that things fall behind, obstacles continue to disappear and, with that, make our true reality emerge, to be purified, rather than the stripping away of possessions. One advances, like a hot-air balloon as ballast is shed, but the ascent of the balloon is not as real as the fall of the ballast; it is not the land that falls away but rather the sky that descends. Peace is always present, replied Ramana Maharshi to someone who asked him how to attain peace; one only has to move one's obstacles out of the way. Paths are paths as long as they are left behind; means are means as long as they are overcome and become superfluous once used. These same means for our spiritual progress can become obstacles when they are transformed into aims or become indispensable. As the well-known Buddhist parable has it, the raft we have used to take us from the shores of "worldliness" to the "farther shore" is abandoned once the crossing is over. More than our progress, it is the regress of what we are not and the ingress or entrance into what we truly are. This is what the three *mārga* are: paths of purification.

The metaphor of the path yields yet another interpretation of Hindū spirituality: great importance is placed on it in general terms to avoid its interpretation degenerating into anarchy: Generally a *guru*, a spiritual master, is needed. Because the path is eminently personal, someone else is required, someone who has already travelled the path, one who will communicate their experience so as to enable us to discover ours.

We have taken our time over this meditation on transcendentals as with it we encroach upon a crucial point in any true and faithful description of *dharma* in Hinduism: its mystical character. Mysticism is not a luxury for those commonly known as "mystics." Mysticism is not an additive or added extra tagged on to the human being, the speciality of a privileged few. Mysticism is the complete experience of reality. Man could be defined (keeping to typically Western thinking) as a mystic animal. The different dimensions of reality do not compete among themselves or strive to gain pre-eminence. Mysticism discovers the harmony of the transcendentals—without, however, being insensitive or oblivious to the disharmony of existence.

*

In summary, we have described analytically the three traditional ways of Hindū spirituality, not to say of all human movement toward the plenitude of Life. But we have insisted equally upon the fact that there is harmony between them, since strictly speaking the paths are really intertwined rather than three independent strands that man grasps on his ascension to the goal. This has led us to underline the importance of harmony as a kind of transcendental of transcendentals. In fact, harmony is not a simple aesthetic notion, as the majority of philosophical dictionaries would have us believe, but rather a fundamental symbol or signpost to bring us closer to reality. And we say symbol, and not concept, since harmony is

²²⁷ *Mārga*, correctly translated as path, primarily means to search, to aspire, to undertake. It is not so much the material path beneath our feet as our tendency to move forward, the aspiration to move toward the goal, heavenly search, to walk in the direction of liberation. Some church fathers called this kind of journeying *epektasis*.

not intelligible as a rational concept as it demands the perception of both poles at the same time—and not only dialectically. The three *mārga* are neither one nor three. Hence the *advaita* such as we have described.²²⁸

It would be as inexact to say that the *dharma* of Hinduism is one as to say it is multiple. Life does not allow itself to be compartmentalized—although for the purpose of exposition we might proceed by means of analysis.

²²⁸ “Nothing new under the sun” (Ec 1:9): Aristotle already described how the Pythagorans discovered that all the heavens were harmony and number (*arithmon*—which also suggests rhythm); see *Metaphysica* A.5 (986a).

THE PERFECT QUATERNITY

The Four Aspects of Spiritual Life

If three is the mystical number par excellence, if three is in almost all religions the very characteristic of Divinity, four is the perfect cosmic number, namely, the created being's character par excellence. If three is the number of perfection (divine), four is the number of totality (cosmic): four is the base of Pythagoras's *tetraktis* and the tetragram of the name of YHWH; there are four seasons, four dimensions of space, four arms on the cross, and four elements in the West; there are four sacred rivers¹ and four winds, just as there are four horsemen of the Apocalypse,² four phases of the moon, four great truths preached by Buddha, and four worldly empires foretold by Daniel,³ along with four Cherubim⁴ and the angels next to the Lord of hosts.⁵

The number four is no lesser known in India. In fact, Brahmā has four heads and Viṣṇu four arms; medical science has four parts, and there are four ages (*yuga*, *cón*) in a cosmic period, four Veda and four quaternities upon which we shall enlarge with the following.

The Four Castes—*Varṇa*

The *varṇāśrama-dharma*, or the order or duty of castes, is a fundamental part of Hinduism, along with being indispensable for understanding Hindū spirituality. It is a delicate problem, and we should be wary of both an idealizing attitude of atavistic social regimes and the condemnation of tradition, which has been the backbone of a civilization for centuries—although it may have gone through an insufficiently recognized evolution.⁶

The Origin of Varṇāśrama-dharma

Due to the fact of the sociological degeneration of castes in modern-day India, along with the influence of Western lifestyle both in modern society as well as in the mentality of its leaders, it is understandable that the caste system, as it still actually exists in India, is challenged with every right by modern-day society. However, the present situation neither corresponds to the theory of castes nor to the practice of such in other periods. Moreover, not everything about castes is unacceptable even today. Between a society based on classes or one that is not, between a money-orientated society in which inequality is economic and a properly structured and updated caste system, there is no reason why the latter should not

¹ See Gn 2:10.

² See Ap VI.1.

³ See Dan 2:32ff.

⁴ See Ez 1:5ff.

⁵ See Ap IV.6ff.

⁶ See M. Aktor (2002), pp. 243–47.

be seen as more valid than the other two extremes.⁷ Yet all of this is not our concern except in the sense that many modern sociologists question the religious system of the *cāturvarṇyam*, the quadruple order of castes for the above-mentioned reasons, but do so too lightly, without offering any other alternative that does not end up in the struggle of everyone against everyone else.

Owing to the fact that the word *varṇa* (caste) means “color” and that the *brahmins* are generally light-skinned and also because of the extreme rationality of the division of labor and social functions of castes, some scholars have wanted to see their origin as being either an Aryan ruse for racial dominance or perhaps a merely rational invention, intended to structure the division of labor and later crystallizing into the exploitation of lower castes by the higher castes. Without denying that these two factors have played an important role in the structuring of society into castes, there seems little doubt that the origin of the caste system is fundamentally religious, something that does not exclude political and racial factors or the temptation of the “privileged” to abuse—nor does it mean that religious origin is equivalent to a positive axiological valuation. On the other hand, it is legitimate and imperative to ask oneself why religion should sanction this system. We have said over and over again that religion is an anthropological fact (therefore, also a social one) and as such can be employed both in the practice of justice and to condone injustice. We cannot overlook the injustices that even nowadays are perpetuated against the *dalit* and the aboriginal peoples of India, without any religious justification whatsoever. Everyday there are killings and mutilations that go unpunished. But it is not enough for us to just condemn; we should concentrate first on describing a system that has maintained certain coherence for centuries—although without hiding the degeneration into which it has fallen.

By time the first mention of castes appears, they are already fully crystallized and justified by religious sanction. A famous hymn from the *Rg-veda*,⁸ although rather belated,⁹ already mentions the four castes as originating from the mouth (*brāhmins*), from the arms (*kṣatriya*), from the legs (*vaiśya*), and from the feet (*śudra*) of *Brahman*, the primordial divine Man. The first relevant commentary is that of underlining the fact of the unity of the four castes as being different functions of society seen as just one person. Any kind of attribute of a caste is always in the context of the whole.¹⁰ Obviously, when the whole is lost from sight and man is transformed into an autarchic individual, the function eminently linked to the whole degenerates into an unfair privilege. When man is transformed into an individual (something different to a person), the caste loses its reason for being.

The *Bhagavad-gītā* explicitly states that the four castes were created by God and adds that they were made so in view of the different qualities (*guṇa*) and diverse *karman* of men.¹¹ Thus, they are a gift of God and have religious blessing.

⁷ Let us not forget that the difference between rich and poor countries was 3 to 1 in 1820, and had risen to 72 to 1 in 1992. In the year 2000 three countries wielded 50 percent of the world's GNP, while 1 percent of the population (50 million) had the same amount of income as the poorest 2.7 billion. Between 1980 and 2001, the debt of the poorer countries rose to \$4.5 billion, \$368 million more than money received. Not to mention the \$900 billion that the world has spent on weaponry in 2002; it seems that the world feels itself to be threatened and needs to defend itself—from its fellows.

⁸ *RV* X.9.12. Some scholars state that this text is a later and malignant interpolation, although the interpretation it provides cannot be denied.

⁹ As witnessed, albeit very ambiguously, in *RV* VIII.35.16–18.

¹⁰ The first three castes would each present the predominance of one of the three already mentioned fundamental qualities (*guṇa*): *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, respectively.

¹¹ *BG* IV.13.

A long and difficult text from the *Bṛhadāranyaka-Upaniṣad*¹² sheds light on how the castes upon earth correspond to the same castes in heaven, in such a way that the events that occur on earth are a prelude to and a reflection of what happens in heaven. There are also castes among the gods.¹³ This religious sanction is delicately ambivalent. On one hand, castes grant structure and stability to society, and the religious factor leads believers to positively accept, complying with the duties of their respective castes. On the other hand this same stabilizing can become a factor of immobilization and, on occasions, abuse of power by the wielders of such power. In the situation of present-day society, in which religious justification has lost a lot of its steam, the caste system becomes more and more problematic, not to say pernicious, if it is transformed according to *dharma*—a system that can be separated neither from justice nor from truth.¹⁴

Their Function

The qualities of the castes are clearly described in the *Gītā* itself: "Dominance of the mind, control of the senses, austerity, purity, strictness, wisdom, understanding, and faith" are the gift and activity (*karman*) of the *brahman*.¹⁵ "Strength, audacity, bravery, skill, endurance in battle, generosity, and leadership" are the endowment of the *kṣatriya*.¹⁶ "Culture of the countryside, of animal herds and commerce" is the function of the *vaiśya*,¹⁷ and lastly, "work as service" the duty of the *śūdra*.¹⁸

The role of each of the castes is described in the Laws of *Manu* or *Mānavadharma-sastra*.¹⁹ But the castes of *Manu* are flexible. It is specified that through conduct a *brahman* can become a *śūdra*²⁰ and vice versa.²¹ Moreover, "If the qualities of a born-twice one (the three first castes) exist in a *śūdra* and not in the former, a *śūdra* is not a *śūdra*, nor is a *brahman*, *brahman*," states the *Mahābhārata*²²—although there are many passages that seem to justify privileges and inequalities.

Their Spirituality

Although the *Manu-smṛti* recognizes the right of the first three castes to celebrate sacrifices as man's participation in the destiny of the cosmos, the later tradition specifies that only the *brahmin* can offer the others' sacrifice, and that the other two castes can only offer it to themselves, and clearly for the same reason (since education and sacrifice are connected) they should only teach in the case of need. Significantly, although the *kṣātra* is the highest caste, the *brahmin* is its source, and even though the *kṣatriya* presides over the great sacrifice (*rajasuya*), the *brahmin* should be honored as if it were proceeding from

¹² BU I.4.10–15.

¹³ See Ranade (1926), p. 60.

¹⁴ See BU I.4.14.

¹⁵ BG XVIII.42. We spell *brahmin* thus to distinguish it from *brahman*.

¹⁶ BG XVIII.43.

¹⁷ BG XVIII.44.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Manu* I.87–91. See the word "manu" in the glossary.

²⁰ *Manu* II.168.

²¹ *Manu* X.65.

²² *VanP* CLXXX.25.

him.²³ The authentic hierarchy is not pyramidal. Only the *brahmin* has the capacity to be a priest, although, in general, in the case of public sacrifice, not all *brahmins* are capable of this. Hence there is a particular sacramental priesthood that only members of the first caste are eligible for, a general priesthood of caste that all *brahmins* have, and a human religious priesthood in which all three first castes partake.

These first three castes are those which allow their members to be "born twice" (*dvija*),²⁴ which is, strictly speaking, to be regenerated into spiritual life. The caste system moves within a dual plane, biological and human. Good works on the merely worldly plane are not enough to attain salvation; it is necessary to have been reborn into the supratemporal order, which is accomplished with the corresponding initiation when the subject is ready to receive it.²⁵ All the theory of the sacraments in Hinduism (*samskara*) is linked to the caste system.²⁶

The caste system is not so much a division of labor, which man should undertake to be able to live in society, as a hierarchization of human duties to attain salvation. As will have been observed, we have managed to maintain a certain balance between extremes. It is an undeniable fact that, even though the Indian Constitution does not recognize the legitimacy of castes, after over half a century they have still not vanished, either from the structure of society nor the consciousness of people. It would be utopian and counterproductive to wish to reestablish the caste system of former days, but so it would be to ignore its reality and not make an effort toward a positive transformation of the actual system. Gandhi's approach, although perhaps conservative, cannot be completely passed over. It is one of the items of unfinished business in modern-day India. And again we have to say that this is a question of spirituality and not just simple political technique. The same is not required of everyone just as the same is not given to everyone. The accomplishment of duties belonging to one's own caste represents a sure path to one's salvation. The fact that this salvation is not attained once and for all, or that different reincarnations have to be lived until being able to attain ultimate salvation (*mokṣa*) does not invalidate the above.

Faithfulness to one's caste as such provides, for those who believe in it, clear expression of their duties and justification for their existence. That, with being satisfied with one's lot, leads to one being passively contented with one's social situation, and passively resigned is often exploited by the privileged castes. This is and has always been too strong a temptation to not succumb to, so much so that it has become one of the most depressing issues in Hinduism. We are talking about the expulsion from the four castes of a large, forever increasing proportion of society, leading to consequent formation of the *parias*, or outcastes, to whom Mahatma Gandhi gave the name *Hari-jan*, that is, children of God (*Hari*) for being shunned by the children of men.²⁷ We should also mention that these days the actual people concerned reject this label, finding it condescending and patronizing. They themselves prefer to be known as *dalit*,²⁸ that is

²³ See BU I.4.13.

²⁴ See Glossary.

²⁵ A well-known verse says, "*janmana jayate sudraḥ samskarad dvija ucyate*" [Through birth one is *sudra*, through *samskara* (sacrament), *dvija* (reborn)], although I do not think that the verse is found in the ancient *smṛti*.

²⁶ On the subject of the sacraments in Hinduism, see Altekar (1952); Datta (1951–56); DuBois (2001); Hamsa (1951); Pandey (1949; 1962); Siqueira (1933); Stevenson (1971); Leeuw (1949).

²⁷ On the issue of castes, from a viewpoint that interests us here, one can consult Deleury (1978), esp. chap. 2; Dumont (1966); Dutt (1968–69); Ghurye (1950); Hutton (1985); Kane (1958); Ketkar (1998); Majumdar & Pusalker (1980); Mayer (1960; phenomenological study of a town of less than one thousand inhabitants); O'Malley (1974); Rao (1931); Frier-Haimendorf (1960).

²⁸ See Prabhakar (1989); Rajshekar Shetty (1978), apart from other quoted authors.

to say, the oppressed (the victims of repression), a label that is still applicable in the twenty-first century and under all governments. Half a century ago, after India's independence, royalty and nobility were abolished at the same time as castes. Even though some regret this, practically no one remembers the *rajas* and *maharajas*. However, castes remain alive in the consciousness of the people. We might ask why.

The *dalit* phenomenon deserves a special mention as not only sociological and political, but also in a book about spirituality. For too long a time now India (and not only India) has cultivated a disembodied spirituality, concentrating on the values of the "spirit" and being negligent of the reality and importance of matter. The mostly stifled (and often crushed) *dalit* rebellions are a wake-up call, even if not very loud, one that alerts the consciousness of Hinduism to the fact that the "other life" cannot be disconnected from this one and that social negligence is a crime against spirituality. It is a paradoxical incongruence that an *advaita* spirituality would have lost sight of the fact that social and political issues also pertain to spiritual life. No one should rend their garments, notwithstanding, since it is just as paradoxical and incongruent that a religion that proclaims the "Resurrection of the flesh" should have ignored the body, if not to say, spurned it.

The problem of castes in Hinduism provides us with a paradigmatic example of the necessary transformation of all *dharma* all over the world, both in the East and the West. The Laws of Manu definitely contain very positive points for a just social order, but they can also be cruel and unfair at the same time. Wishing to reform them is not enough; trying to abolish them as laws has already been done, but eliminating them from the consciousness of the people is illusory. What is really required is a transformation, a *metanoia*, such as the *nous* overcoming what is mental, in Christian terms, as criterion to structure a more just society. Here, the *dharma* of Hinduism is not sufficient, but neither is the current *dharma* of individual competitiveness doing anything to help solve the problem. Gandhi tried to come to a compromise, but modern-day society has gone too far for a reform to be possible. What is needed is some kind of new *dharma* that rises from the ashes of the traditional one—bearing in mind that the ashes have to be; the Western model is simply of no use.

The Four States—*Āśrama*

While awareness of these four traditional states of life has been somewhat lost among much of the population, above all in the cities, it is still extremely alive in the collective subconscious of the people, with a clearly visible sociological legacy, such as the *sadhu* and many who are just waiting to retire from their employment to devote themselves to spiritual life. We are not (yet?) talking about *relics* but rather of a general climate that is still in the air and creates tension these days that is not always resolved between secularity installed by the government, along with the "modernized" elite, on the one hand, and traditional sacrality on the other. Perhaps this tension could be resolved with the distinction that can be made between secularity and secularism and the consciousness of "sacral secularity."²⁹ The Indian Constitution speaks of a secular state, and not a secularized one.

The four states of the spiritual life of man, according to a rather late tradition, correspond to the fourfold division of the *Veda*, into *Mantra*, *Brahmana*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣad*. Youth is considered to be a novitiate in life, life not only meaning mere worldly existence but spiritual life that culminates in Life—call it authentic, eternal, *Nirvāṇa*, *mokṣa*, or simply real life. Study is the concern of this first state and also the recital of brief expressions that can become

²⁹ See Panikkar (2000/XLIII).

ejaculatory prayers, resonant with meaning and known as *mantra*. The second state concerns the house-holding married man. During this period, man should fulfill his duties in society and the world, which are codified in exercises of the rites contained in the *Brahmaṇa*. When one retires to greater dedication to spiritual life, in the third state, one should chant praises to God and live directly and more exclusively in association with that which is transcendent, and along with this, live the allegorization and spiritualization of the religion contained in the *Āraṇyaka*. And finally, when one comes to the ultimate state, "the only necessary one," it is the Upaniṣads that are revealed and lead one by the hand.

It is undeniable that the sociological picture of this division carries a strong aftertaste of patriarchalism—although, as we have indicated, an ancient matriarchal tradition exists both in the North (Meghalaya) and the South (Kerala). It is also undeniable that there has been much abuse, but in the case of the castes, we should not pass too simplistic a judgment. What seems to be true is that the classical scheme of things is no longer viable in modern society and is in need of transformation—a transformation that can only come to pass with cross-fertilization between modern and traditional cultures. The role of women in this transformation could be vitally important. As an undeniable sociological symbol it can be seen that while a large proportion of males, above all the younger generation, have adopted Western clothing, the vast majority of women have preserved their traditional way of dressing. This spontaneous detail reveals to us something more profound in the psyche of Hindū spirituality, and it is the symbol of necessary change in Hindū *dharma* to which we have just referred.

Although many feminist movements have sprung up in modern-day India, generally they are not akin to those that have emerged in the West.³⁰ Women are conquering their place in both public and private life and are beginning to play their role, in spite of the still very present abuse and injustice in many sectors of society—especially among the most discriminated castes. These conquests are made by affirming their dignity without imitating a "unisex" model—despite, here also, the life in highly industrialized urban centers. Our study is not a sociological one, yet we should mention and indeed emphasize that women have a crucial role to play in the necessary transformation of Hindū *dharma*. Having said this, we should again remind ourselves here of the essential role of interculturality. The Hindū family is not the same as the contemporary Western family, nor is Indian women's psychology the same as the Western woman's. This is a delicate issue and needs prior dialogue that can provide exogenous answers to India's—at all events, very real—problems. A certain "missionary" mentality still prevails in the "post-Christian" West, which is evident in the so-called aid to the "third world."³¹ But we shall steer clear of this issue, important as it may be.

It appears that there were only three states in the beginning, and the fourth was a later addition, the one known as *Ātyāśrama*, that is, "beyond all *āśrama*." It also seems to be a fact that at first they were not interpreted as four states that had to be reached one after the other, but rather as different paths or vocations to follow depending on one's *svadharma*, the personal duty of everyone. In fact, as we are about to see, the second state is considered to be the central state, to which the first is preparation and the third its continuation, and then perhaps the fourth as the overcoming of it all.³²

It has been observed, and not without reason, that in the four states of Hinduism an attempt at synthesis has been made to bridge between active and contemplative lives and indeed between the worldly life and ascetic life. Effectively, the four states harmonize the

³⁰ See the *Strī-śakti* movement, strong in Maharashtra, and *Manushi* magazine, published in Delhi.

³¹ See, as a unique example, the illuminating testimony of a Persian diplomat: Rahnama (2003).

³² See *Manu* VI.87.

instincts and tendencies constitutive of man within human existence, drawn, on one hand, to an ultrawordly life that seems to demand of him total renunciation of what is seen, and whatever attracts, and on the other hand attracted by the world to form a family and build a society. The most authentic Hindū spirituality is touched by this synthesis and harmony, although not without tensions. Ascetics do not feel envious of the world perhaps because either they are ready to come back and help it or perhaps they have left it behind for a superior good. The worldly man does not have an inferiority or guilt complex, because he has already gone through a rigorous novitiate and knows that once he has completed his duty with society and also fulfilled his desire for worldly love, wealth, and power, he will end up retiring himself to a more spiritual life. Monks are not beset with pride, considering themselves superior, nor do they envy the comfort of others, because they have voluntarily left all this behind after having experienced it earlier in their lives—or in previous existences if, as it happens sometimes, they have not been through the intermediate states.

The debated etymology of the word *āśrama* is revealing, both for the human and especially Indic tendency of recurring to the origins and wisdom of words, and for the word's semantic content. In fact, *āśrama* could come from *śramaṇa* (to go on a pilgrimage, walk), and the negative particle *a* would mean a place of rest and peace, this being one of the modern meanings. The *āśrama* (ashrams) of Gandhi, of Aurobindo, those of the five Śaṅkarācārya, of Ramana Maharshi, Śivananda, and so many others, including Christian ones, and so on, are all well-known retreats.

The root of the word could also be *śram* [work, make an effort] and so the *āśrama* would be a place or a state of asceticism and labor to enable the attainment of the fulfillment of life.

But the same root word could indicate fatigue, to be exhausted (this is what *śrama* means in the *Rg Veda*) and then *āśrama* would mean rest, peace, tranquility, after the weariness caused by life.

It is the spatial connotation that has brought about the evolution of the word from states (stages of life) to place (sanctuaries of peace and discipline).

However you wish to take it, the theory and practice of the *āśrama* (as stages in life) have deep symbolic value. In the first place the *āśrama* symbolize the hierarchy in the very life of human beings—and hence man's rights and duties. Second, they symbolize the overcoming of the separation (originating in Greek culture) between what is public and private. Man is not an individual who lives in two worlds. God is not solely a private affair, in the same way that politics is not just a public activity. Third, the *āśrama* also symbolize the insertion of the sacred into the profane sphere of life and vice versa—however difficult it may seem to be to maintain the balance. Pro-fanity, the pro-fane, has a relationship with the *śantum* (temple, that which is sacred), and both, although they should be distinguished from each other, cannot be separated in personal life. Moreover, they mutually condition each other.³³ Fourth, the *āśrama* also symbolize overcoming the dichotomy between individuals and society—perhaps at a higher level than the one represented by castes. Man is not an isolated individual.

This brief digression serves as a particular example of the possible repercussions of “Hindū spirituality” in human life at other latitudes. A classless society without any sort of hierarchy needs equalitarian democracy that in turn implies the rule of quantity over quality.

Notions such as *samānya dharma*—or *dharma* common to all Hindūs without distinction of the states—which we shall now go on to describe, could not possibly be missing from a description of Hinduism. It is also a characteristic of *sanātana dharma*

³³ See Panikkar (2000/XLIII), in which an attempt is made to present sacred secularity as a *novum* for an appropriate spirituality for human consciousness in the third millennium.

that this Hindū rule or duty is interpreted as a universal *dharma* for humanity.³⁴ This would be the “religion of man,” or universal religion as Tagore interpreted it in the most pure Hindū spirit.³⁵

The Student—Brahmacarin

The Novice

The life we live is a novitiate for true Life—with or without hope of continuity, depending on different spiritualities. But actual worldly existence entails initiation to life, which at other latitudes would be known as education.

The first period of study and discipline that usually begins at twelve and generally lasts a quarter of our lives (although many texts extend them to forty-eight years and, exceptionally, to a whole lifetime) is dedicated to knowledge of the doctrine of salvation and to the acquisition of all virtues. The lifestyle is very rigorous and meticulously laid down: arise before dawn, perform strict ablutions, offer sacrifice and recite morning prayer (*samdhya*), go out into the world to beg for alms to be put at the feet of the master, and eat whatever the master gives (frugal food with no fermented drinks, spices, or animal flesh), to later dedicate oneself to study and discipline obeying the preceptor; worship and meditation from when the sun goes down until the stars come out and afterward a second meal.³⁶

An outstanding characteristic of this first stage is perfect chastity, to the point where these days *brahmacarya* is synonym for celibate. Even involuntary loss of semen, which is considered a waste of energy and dissipation of the person, should be carefully avoided.

The educational disciplines vary from school to school and even master to master. Yoga spirituality would belong here.³⁷ It is evident that the idea of education that underlies this type of life is a far cry from the teaching methods practiced at institutions in modern India, which are copied from British methods—with few but important exceptions that seek to prolong the traditional ideal of the *gurukula*. Here in the traditional setting, education is considered to be training to live Life, consciously and profoundly. This education does not consist in feeding students information that will enable them to find a job and earn the right to exist (usually aired as “earn a living”) but rather to awaken the latent potentialities in students that allow them to reach their plenitude.³⁸ But this task cannot be accomplished alone. Man needs interaction with society, especially with those who have acquired experience of life and have gained authority to allow them to live it without violence.

³⁴ Significantly, Nilakanṭha Goreh, a scholar from Varanasi in the first half of the nineteenth century, to counteract the attraction exerted on the Hindūs by Christianity, interprets *sanatana dharma* as being identical to Hinduism and rules out Christianity as being *mohadharma*, illusory and pernicious *dharma*. I said “significantly” because having attacked Jesus for being *mohavatara*—false divine manifestation—in 1848 he had an experience of Christ and was converted to Christianity. Hindūva ideology seems to want to resuscitate this animosity.

³⁵ See Tagore (2002).

³⁶ See *Manu* II.54–57, 177–81, 191, etc.

³⁷ See *Manu* II.100.

³⁸ The expression “gain a living,” common in the civilization of employment, as a synonym of having a salary or economic recourses, is thought scandalous in traditional India.

The Master—Guru

"Who has taught you all this?" inquired the master to Satyakama, who was radiant as if he were one who had known *brahman*. "Not precisely men—he replied—but I would rather you taught me, oh master."³⁹ "Only the doctrine taught by the *guru* is the one that serves to attain the end of all knowledge, which is salvation," the student went on to say.⁴⁰ Teaching is a sacred act.

The doctrine of salvation and the true knowledge of the Truth (*Brahman*, God, etc.) cannot be obtained with exclusively theoretical means because they belong to a transcendental order. Hence the absolute necessity of a personal initiation, conducted by another person who is capable of communicating the flowing waters of salvific knowledge. In Hinduism, the master is essential and indispensable. Self-instruction or autodidacticism are contradictions *in terminis*.

That which many cannot even hear,
whom many, even when hearing, do not know
... taught by a man of inferior (knowledge),
Cannot be understood
... only those who know can understand
... because it is out of reach of any reasoning.⁴¹

Thus goes a well-known and classical text whose traditional meaning is the justification of the *guru* as spiritual master to make us "realize" the truth that saves. Without a master, realization is impossible. Superior knowledge only comes by means of living communication from the *guru*.⁴²

On the other hand, the *guru* will take very great care in teaching beyond reasoning and above all to the heart of his disciple; he will teach only that which can be understood and withstood.⁴³

Only those who have completed their rites and studied the scriptures [...] only to those can this knowledge of *brahman* (*brahman-vidyam*) be communicated.⁴⁴

To those who have not subjugated their passions and to those who are not disciples or dutiful sons should the mysteries of the Veda not be communicated.⁴⁵

And, almost as an appendix for the whole work, the *Gītā* tells us that it should not be talked about to "someone who does not lead an austere life, who does not have the love of God and who does not obey Him."⁴⁶ This prudence is not inspired by an artificial esoteric desire

³⁹ CUIV.9.2.

⁴⁰ CUIV.9.3.

⁴¹ *KathU*1.2.7–9. See CUIV.9.1–3. We refrain from adding an Indologic commentary to this text and from commenting upon the forced interpretation of the great Śaṅkara.

⁴² See the Christian *fides ex auditu* [faith through audition] in Rom 10:29.

⁴³ See Jn 16:12.

⁴⁴ *MandU*III.2.10. See also CUIII.11.5–6.

⁴⁵ *SU*VI.22. See also *BU*VI.3.12; *MaitU*VI.29.

⁴⁶ *BG*XIII.67.

to keep a secret from others, but rather, by respect for the actual sacred doctrine and by being economical with teachings, since those who are not spiritually prepared are not even capable of understanding what it is about.⁴⁷ As we have already mentioned, the underlying idea is the eminently experiential character of the doctrine of salvation. The path of Hindū spirituality is not a mere trail of goodwill, but rather it presupposes action and the initiative of divine grace.

Neither through simple instruction, nor intellectual capacity, nor even through much listening [to the scriptures] might the *ātman* be reached, but only those who are chosen by it; the *ātman* can only be attained by those to whom it is revealed.

Thus states a famous text.⁴⁸

Solely through the grace of God can man see the greatness of the *ātman*—*ātman* hidden within all creatures' hearts. An already quoted very ambiguous phrase affirms that it is not very pleasant for Gods that men should know the ultimate truth—because they would cease from being human (metaphysical interpretation) or because they would no longer offer sacrifice to the Gods (sociological interpretation).⁴⁹

On the other hand, the *guru* will take extremely good care of providing another, different doctrine to the traditional and perennial one. At bottom, the *guru* does not communicate any doctrine, but rather he or she makes those who are capable participate vibrantly in unison with their spiritual experience. Moreover, in fact, it is not the *guru*'s persona that teaches, but rather the grace of God, and the actual Divinity that uses the *guru* as an intermediate to show the disciple the way. Hence it will never be a matter for the *guru* to attract or search for disciples.⁵⁰ It is the disciple who, in the search of God, stumbles upon him in the *guru*'s persona. Thus, strictly speaking, the problem of originality is left unapproached, as passivity is also a specific quality of the *guru*. It is often said in some Western circles that the problem in the world is the scarcity of masters. In contrast, the Indian answer consists in saying that what we are suffering from is the crisis of disciples, of those who are willing to listen and learn. It is the disciple that makes the master, although to be a *guru* is nothing to be sneezed at. Here, the same as with everything, relationality is constitutive.

Here is a typical description along Śivaitic lines:

A true guru is a man who is in the habit of practicing all the virtues; who with the sword of wisdom has lopped off all the branches and torn out all the roots of sin, and who has dispersed, with the light of reason, the thick shadows in which sin is shrouded . . . who has the feelings of a father for all his disciples; who makes no difference in his conduct between his friends and his enemies, and shows equal kindness to both; who looks on gold and precious stones with the same indifference as on pieces of iron or potsherd, and values the one as highly as the other; whose chief care is to enlighten the ignorance in which the rest of mankind is plunged. He is a man who performs all the acts of worship of which Śiva is the object, omitting none; who knows no other God than Śiva, and reads no other history than his . . . who rejects, even in thought, any sinful action, and puts in practice all the virtues that he

⁴⁷ *KathU* I.20–23. See Mt 7:6.

⁴⁸ *KathU* I.20–23.

⁴⁹ *BU* I.4.10.

⁵⁰ Although the text of the *KathU* that we are commenting upon adds as an exclamation, "We can find, Naciketas, a disciple like you!"

preaches. . . . He should be deeply learned, and know the *Vedānta* perfectly. He is a man who has made pilgrimages to all the holy places . . . He must have performed his ablutions in all the sacred rivers . . . He must be one who has practiced these religious exercises, and who has derived benefit from them. He must be perfectly acquainted with the four Vedas, the *Tarka-sāstram* (or logic), the *Bhūta-sāstram* (exorcism), the *Mīmāṃsa-sāstram* (exegetics, etc.), etc. . . . This is the character of a true guru; these are the qualities which he ought to possess, that he may be in a position to show others the path of virtue and help them out of the slough of vice.⁵¹

Yet nonetheless, their strength is not in their personality but in their *guru* being. The following story is a very well known illustration of the case in point: A crocodile-infested river forbade the crossing to the *guru* and *śiṣya* (disciple). The latter, filled with faith in his master, thought that it was annoying that such an obstacle should encumber their path, and calling forth his master's name plunged into the water reaching the opposite bank safe and sound, since the crocodiles were fearful and cowed away. The master, amazed at the power of his own name, also dived in, shouting his name, but alas, he was immediately devoured by the crocodiles. . . . No one is their own *guru*. Another example that any kind of "objectivization" is just as false as pure "subjectivity."

Indian spirituality has developed a complete theology of obedience with this motive. Obedience to the *guru* is no more than obedience to God, and as such, there is no difference between honoring and serving the *guru* or God.⁵² Obedience does not make a doctrine, nor does it presuppose critical discrimination of those who, by definition, are not capable of it, and because of this it is not merely rational obedience but rather religious obedience.⁵³ *Gurus* do not teach a theoretical doctrine; they guide people. Obedience is the maximum form of all sacrifice because it is the sacrifice of the will, which is dragged along with them right up to their intellect.⁵⁴ Within, the *guru* hosts not only God's will (that, torn away from the Self, would be no more than an abstraction) but God in person.⁵⁵ It is often said that the *guru* is an incarnation of Divinity, but this statement is not to be interpreted within substantialist categories. Here we should also mention the danger of the abuse of false *gurus* and irrationality of fanatic disciples. As to not slip into irrationality one should distinguish between total obedience to the *guru* and the disciple's vision of "obedientiality." The latter should obey his or her master even if they do not understand the *guru's* command, yet they should understand *the reason* for the commandment—for instance, so that they are able to curb their will or to teach them humility.

⁵¹ Abbe J. A. Dubois, *Hindū Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, 123–25.

⁵² It is important to take note that the word that is constantly used to express the relationship of disciples and masters is *śraddha*, that is to say, faith. Faith is essentially personal, and it is referred to the guru although not as a simple individual but rather an incarnation of Divinity. See the cited *Sarva Vedānta siddhanta sara samgraha* no. 210. The whole work contains extremely valuable theology of the spiritual master.

⁵³ See, for a comparative study, which here we have not allowed ourselves, Wach (1925); Durr (1938); and even though Hausherr (1955) only deals with Eastern Christians it is very useful for providing an important point of reference. We should remember that *De Magistro* is a classical title in Latin culture. More recently a great number of publications on the subject of the master-disciple relationship have appeared on the scene.

⁵⁴ See Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* II-II.186.5 and also 8.

⁵⁵ See *Rāmāyaṇa*, I.20.21. Śaṅkara names God *sadguru*, or universal *guru*: *Vivekacūḍamaṇi*; 1. See the Madhavananda version (1944).

The institution of the *guru* gives Hinduism a markedly personalistic and even individual character. There can be no possible religious life without a spiritual master, and the fact that there is hardly any organization whatsoever in Hinduism allows Hindū hierarchy to be fundamentally charismatic and spiritual. Strictly speaking, saints are the only authority in Hinduism.⁵⁶

The Citizen—Grhastha

Once the age of adult maturity is reached, the young students return to the world, or better said they enter into it and get married, or rather, they are betrothed. Husbands and wives do not choose each other but rather they freely accept each other, in the same manner as they do not choose their parents or homeland, or the moment they come into the world, or their true vocation. The best values in life always come freely gifted, such as the truest of loves. All this simply depends on one knowing how to live in the mode of thanksgiving.⁵⁷ A slightly unrealistic well-known phrase captures this: "Westerners marry whom they love; Easterners love whom they marry." Outside their respective contexts the phrase seems to be intolerable—and even within them it is not absolutely true. Their life is therefore meticulously governed,⁵⁸ and their duties range from living off their work, honoring their guests, offering the five daily sacrifices,⁵⁹ and exercising piety toward all.⁶⁰ Just as all creatures are sustained by air, all other states are also underpinned by the *grhastha*.⁶¹ A treatise of the very *Manu-Smṛiti* states,

Only is a man perfect when he consists of three (united people): with his wife and children.⁶²

The *grhastha* is a parent and householder. Their duty is to procure happiness along with material gain for all their people and their subcaste. Politics has its place here, and Hindū spirituality is not unrelated to the preoccupations of this world.⁶³ Of the four values we are about to mention in the next section, wealth (*artha*) and human love (*kama*) are secular characteristics of man, of a citizen who does not want to shed the stages in life before time and who, as such, worries about worldly affairs without

⁵⁶ Tantrism would say that the *guru* constitutes the root (*mula*) of initiation (*diksa*); and this in turn the root of the *mantra*; and this, the *devata* (Divinity, or particular divine invocation of the individual persona); and this, the root of perfection and salvation (*sidani*). See Woodroffe (1990). What is important for us to point out here is the aspect of continuity, meaning not just physical but intellectual continuity in Hinduism.

⁵⁷ See that liturgical petition of Christianity: "... ut in gratiarum actione semper maneamus" [so that we always remain in action of thanksgiving].

⁵⁸ For instance, according to the *Manusmṛiti* III.45–49, marital union is allowed ten nights a month.

⁵⁹ These are *brahma-yajna* or sacrifice to God with study, teaching, and the example of the sacral doctrine (the Veda); *deva-yajna* or sacrifice to Divinities or angelic spirits, in the different offerings and rites; *pitṛ-yajna* or sacrifice to ancestors; *bhūta-yajna* or care and concern for animals, especially domestic ones; and finally the *manusya-yajna* or the veneration to the man in the persona of the *brahmān*, the guest and the poor person.

⁶⁰ See *Manu* III.114ff.; IV.17, etc.

⁶¹ *Manu* III.77.

⁶² *Manu* IX.45 (according to the translation by Bühler [1897]).

⁶³ Just the mention of the *Artha-śāstra* by Kautilya should be enough.

the least Manichaeist or Jansenist complex. One characteristic of Hindū spirituality is the coexistence of different forms of life, without the slightest feeling of any kind of unspoken reproach from those who could consider themselves to be superior regarding more relaxed forms of life.

Once again we state that Hinduism is a way of life and not simply doctrine. This projection of categories, beyond the cultural-religious context of India, has led to misunderstandings at all levels of life. The majority of modern classifications cannot be applied to the traditional culture of Hinduism. To classify one thing as merely cultural and something else as something exclusively religious means nothing, neither does separating religion from politics (while not advocating theocracy), nor theology from philosophy. Everything has its advantages and disadvantages and not everything can be explained with modern criteria, just as modernity does not allow itself to adapt to other traditional life forms. Yet although many customs of Hindū spirituality appear to be or actually have become "obsolete," many dormant archetypes of the soul of the people of India awake somewhat violently when they come up against modernity. One should not overlook the fact that while in the West there has been an endogenous evolution over centuries, in the East there has been an exogenous revolution for just decades. History goes at its own pace not induced by individuals. Perhaps, the rather chaotic situation in modern India has much to do with this alteration in the pace of history.

We have already pointed out two features of this spirituality, a negative one and a positive one. In the case of the former we refer to the undeniable patriarchalism of many statements and customs. The positive feature underpins the value in what we have named "sacred secularity." Family life (which does not mean monogamy or patriarchalism) lies at the core of human life.

It would be irresponsible to seek to defend Hinduism at all cost or try to maintain its dominant patriarchalism, but one should try to understand all ways of life.⁶⁴

The Hermit—Vana-prastha

"When a parent (*grhastha*) sees wrinkles (in his skin) and gray hairs (on his head), and the children of his children, then he should retire to the mountain."⁶⁵ The *vana-prastha* are those who have gone into and "established themselves in the forest." The meaning of this retreat from the world can be summed up as a triple mode of asceticism: to unburden oneself of the load of civil life, to leave place for generations to come and to prepare oneself for the ultimate liberation. For this very same reason hermits may take their spouses if they desire to go with them, though because of their age any motive of sexual indulgence is excluded. They can also abide in relative comfort in the forest, have friends visit, and engage in spiritual conversation with them. But nor are penitence and asceticism excluded and, in fact, tradition is replete with famous ascetics who attracted the most distinguished people and achieved the most amazing feats. Some of these joined in associations for ascetic hermits.

This act of retreating from active life to dedicate oneself solely to a more or less pure life of contemplation is still practiced today in modern India. Some will leave everything behind and will go to a sacred place such as Varanasi to await their death, others will remain at home but without working and devoting themselves to a variety of pastimes.

⁶⁴ A woman once told me, by the way, that she was not at all illiterate or poor, backed up in her views by those of lower castes; the poor males think they are in charge yet they have left us the best things in life: the house (in all its connotations) and children.

⁶⁵ *Manu* VI.2.

The early age of forced retirement, these days still very present above all in official employment,⁶⁶ does not only stem from an average lifespan shorter than in the West but also stems from the belief that work, above all economically productive work, forms nothing more than a portion (a small one at that) of man's mission upon the earth. The current tendency to delay obligatory retirement, owing to economic reasons, shows just how far the religious sense in Hindū India can be seen to be threatened by "modern civilization." Soon, the age of retirement will also be brought forward, as machines become more economical than human beings. The "*Homo economicus*" is gaining ground in society. A very ironic paradox would be that the early retirements in contemporary capitalist society seem to back up traditional practice—although, unfortunately, its meaning has been waylaid.

The spirituality of the *vana-prastha* possesses a feature that is well worth pointing out: life is there to be lived—and nothing else. Life has a meaning in itself, in just being life, and not because it is justified by something else. We have already said that originally this was the last state. Yet the fact is that life has depths that escape us unless we concentrate on living it. That is why, in a certain manner, we need to have satisfied or obviated all the immediate objectives of our desires, even the noblest of desires, before entering.

Nevertheless, verticality is incommensurable with horizontality. Even so, the thirst for the infinite of man also seeks to be expressed as a noninstitutionalized form of life, but by force of events it has been institutionalized as the fourth *āśrama*.

The Monk—Saṃnyāsin

Those who aspire to salvation without having satisfied the three great duties of man previously—to the Gods through sacrifice, to ancestors by perpetuating the caste with family life, and to the wise prophets (*ṛṣi*) through study of the Vedas—could actually end up in hell.⁶⁷ This in itself proves the seriousness of this fourth state. However it is true that the impulse toward perfection in life and total detachment has been so strong in India that the case of young *saṃnyāsin* it is not at all unusual, those who, without going through the second and third stages, enter directly into the *saṃnyāsin* stage. Indian justification for this, however, is as follows: the young *saṃnyāsin* in question has already fulfilled the above-mentioned duties in previous existences, and the proof of this is the irresistible vocation that they feel toward total renunciation, which they would not be aware of if their *karman* had not already been purified of unworthy adhesions.

Let him not desire to die, let him not desire to live; let him wait for (his appointed) time, as a servant (waits) for the payment of his wages.

Let him put down his foot purified by his sight, let him drink water purified by (straining with) a cloth, let him utter speech purified by truth, let him keep his heart pure.

Let him patiently bear hard words, let him not insult anybody, and let him not become anybody's enemy for the sake of this (perishable) body.

Against an angry man let him not in return show anger, let him bless when he is cursed, and let him not utter speech, devoid of truth, scattered at the seven gates.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ In 1960 the age for retirement was fifty for university professors.

⁶⁷ *Manu* VI.35.

⁶⁸ The five senses along with the mind and heart (*manas* and *buddhi*).

Delighting in what refers to the Soul, sitting (in the postures prescribed by the Yoga), independent (of external help), entirely abstaining from sensual enjoyments, with himself for his only companion, he shall live in this world, desiring the bliss (of final liberation).⁶⁹

The entire sixth chapter of the *Bhagavad-gītā* is an exemplary description of the true *saṁnyāsin*, there also known as the *yogin*. This is one who fulfills with his (active) duties by renouncing the fruit of all his actions⁷⁰ because he has also renounced himself.⁷¹ The very word *saṁnyāsin* means “renunciation.”⁷² But not only does the control of the senses and self-dominance form the true monk’s characteristics.⁷³ He also possesses serenity in his whole being and offers his friendship to all beings without distinction of good and bad, friend or enemy,⁷⁴ as all his happiness is to be found within the Supreme Being.⁷⁵ “By seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self, one attains the transcendental *brahman*, not by any other means.”⁷⁶

“Desiring only him (*ātman*) monks renounce their children, wealth and worlds . . .” states a text from the Upaniṣad,⁷⁷ which became classical because of the relevant commentary by *Śaṅkaracarya*: Monks renounce the three worlds—earth, hell, and heaven—to search only for the absolute; for this reason they abandon all their desires, including gaining perfection, because this is not acquired as something to be conquered or even something to become aware of which cannot be seen, but rather that with the quenching of all desire that which *is* and has always been appears. Strictly speaking, the desire of *brahman* should be overcome; only that which has still not been accomplished can be desired.

For this very reason *saṁnyāsin* even renounce rites and no longer take part in sacrifice, nor do they dwell upon what is happening (or “conditional *brahman*”⁷⁸), since their life is upon the other shore and is above all caste and all temporal duty. *Saṁnyāsa*, rather than the fourth *āśrama*, is the *ati-āśrama*, the state beyond all stages. The *saṁnyāsin* have destroyed their sacred cord, their caste no longer means anything, they have lost their name, their home no longer exists, they have no material or spiritual possessions.

Although the ideal *saṁnyāsin* are anchorites, over time they have formed families of monks, who, although generally living independently, at least followed a common tradition. There are hundreds of *sadhu* associations these days.

The oldest one seems to have been formed in the eighth century before Christ by Pārśvanatha, later to be reformed by Mahavira in the sixth century, giving rise to Jainism. The four great precepts of the former were: total respect for all living beings (with the consequent strictly vegetarian diet), absolute truthfulness, perfect chastity, and renunciation of any kind of personal property. It is instructive to observe the later development of monastic precepts. Mahavira added a fifth: respect for other people’s property (for understandable

⁶⁹ *Manu* VI.45–49.

⁷⁰ *BG* VI.1.

⁷¹ *BG* I.2.

⁷² See Glossary.

⁷³ See *BG* IV.4.7, 8; etc.

⁷⁴ *BG* VI.9.

⁷⁵ *BG* 20.

⁷⁶ *BG* 30. See *IsU* 6 and the already quoted *KaivU* 10.

⁷⁷ *BU* IV.4.22.

⁷⁸ We present simple Sanskrit expressions to provide a sample of up-to-date notions in Hindū spirituality and facilitate a more detailed study of Hindū *dharma*. See Joshi (2002).

reasons of tempering excessive zeal).⁷⁹ Buddhism came onto the scene almost at the same time as Jainism and added another five precepts onto Mahavira's: to eat only once a day; to avoid any kind of show or entertainment (music, dance, etc.); to renounce the use of crowns, incense, cosmetics, and so on; to sleep on the bare floor; and to not even touch gold and silver (coins). In the eighth century after Christ, *Śaṅkara* founded an order based on his own theology, and later on Rāmanuja and Madhva went on to start other *saṃnyāsin* associations in tune with their own religious beliefs.⁸⁰

The essence of Hindū monasticism is its eminently contemplative character and its a-cosmic tendency. Monks are no longer of this world. It has really died as far as they are concerned, and as such they expect nothing of it—not even for society to tolerate them, nor do they beg alms or food if it is not given to them, and if they receive any they never give thanks, which would be the beginning of a bond with this world.⁸¹ *A guisa de resumen* we shall translate an unusual Vedic text:⁸²

The *Kesin*

1. Within him is fire, within him is drink,
within him both earth and heaven.
He is the Sun which views the whole world,
he is indeed Light itself—
the long-haired ascetic.
2. Girded with the wind, they have donned ocher mud
for a garment. So soon as the Gods
have entered within them, they follow the wings
of the wind, these silent ascetics.
3. Intoxicated, they say, by our austerities,
we have taken the winds for our steeds.
You ordinary mortals here below
see nothing except our bodies.
4. He flies through midair, the silent ascetic,
beholding the forms of all things.
To every God he has made himself
a friend and collaborator.
5. Ridden by the wind, companion of its blowing,
pushed along by the Gods,
he is at home in both seas, the East
and the West—this silent ascetic.
6. He follows the track of all the spirits,
of nymphs and the deer of the forest.

⁷⁹ On the subject of Jainism, see Shanta (1985), and in Spanish, Paniker (2001). On Buddhism apart from texts already mentioned, see Nakamura (1989); Thomas (1997). In Spanish, see Harvey (1998).

⁸⁰ On the subject of monasticism in India apart from the already mentioned works, see Brunton (1992); S. Datta (1958), vol. 2; Dumont (1980), which bases Hindū spirituality on the dialogue between the *saṃnyāsin* and the *brahmān*, that is to say, the man who renounces this world and he who lives in it; Dutt (1941–45); Geden (1951); Farquhar (1928). Olivelle (1976) is fundamental.

⁸¹ On the issue of Christian monasticism in India, see Abhishiktes Varananda (1956a; 1956b; 1956c); Monchanin & Le Saux (1957); VV. AA (1990).

⁸² *RV* X.136.

Understanding their thoughts, bubbling with ecstasies,
 their appealing friend is he—
 the long-haired ascetic.

7. The wind has prepared and mixed him a drink;
 it is pressed by Kunamnama.
 Together with Rudra he has drunk from the cup
 of poison—the long-haired ascetic.⁸³

*

It could be said that these pages describe an ideal and utopic conception of reality. There is a double traditional Hindū reaction. On one hand it consists in saying that solely utopia and the model are capable of providing the spurring and intuition to realize it. On the other hand, these idyllic descriptions of reality allow us to live in this (other) idyllic world, which not because of this is any less real. One of the most discouraging results of the encounter between Western and Eastern mentality (it is worth simplifying and making a caricature) the modern Western impression that Indians live in a “theoretical” (dreamlike) world that is taken to be real. Consequently, neither do they have a guilt complex as they do not reach the ideal, nor “purpose of amendment,” because in their praxis (read “real” life) it leaves a lot to be desired. We shall touch upon this subject in the section of this chapter titled “The Four Dimensions of Reality.”

The Four Values—*Puruṣārtha*

Since Albert Schweitzer stated that the Hindū religion denies the world, in contrast to Judaism and Christianity, which affirm secular values, there are hardly any Hindū writers that, on mentioning this issue, do not feel obliged to contradict such a statement.⁸⁴ The very vehemence with which they contradict it proves that the problem is not an irrelevant one. At the same time it also shows up to what point a certain Western- Judeo-Christian mentality has crept into the ambience of neo-Hindūism. We do not wish to go any further into this issue, because generally it enhances too much of an apologetic spirit, which makes us forget that the scatologic dimension and even a certain overcoming of that which is worldly is essential in all religions. However, it would be untrue to present Hinduism as a religion only to be worried about ultra-worldly values and brand it as being unknowing and even oblivious to human and still more than human temporary reality. In fact, both dimensions are present in Hindū spirituality, which seeks to establish a synthesis between these two constituting tendencies of all religions. For instance, all the spirituality of śāktism is nothing but the attempt at such synthesis, which seeks to unite the spirit with more materialistic realities of the human body.

Since the Laws of Manu and since the times of the *Mahābhārata*, *abhyudaya* (material gain, worldly enjoyment) and *niḥśreyasa* (supreme bliss) have been distinguished as being the two aims to which the accomplishment of correct duty lead.⁸⁵ It is precisely the lack of belief in original sin that allows Hinduism to be more optimistic than certain branches of Christianity when it comes down to the harmonic conjugation of both kinds of bliss.⁸⁶

⁸³ In *The Vedic Experience. Mantramajari*: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 4, part 1.

⁸⁴ See Schweitzer (1978).

⁸⁵ See *Manu* XII.88.

⁸⁶ See *SantPar* CXXIII.5ff.

The first group of values is usually divided into love, wealth, and duty. These form as a bridge that connects us with the fourth value of the second group, which consists in eternal salvation or supreme happiness.⁸⁷ We shall make an attempt at describing them very schematically.

Sensual Love—Kama

The first value of the *trivarga* (three categories) of the first mentioned group is sensual love, especially sexual love. A classical Hindū book, the *Kamasūtra*, speaks of this almost exclusively, and in an extremely explicit manner.⁸⁸ *Kama* is also identified with desire,⁸⁹ a mythological God that the *Atharva-veda* has no doubt in exalting as the first of Gods, with a long and complex mythology.⁹⁰

Sensual pleasure and carnal desire have their place in Hinduism, up to its highest degree in some schools, but what interests us is positive valuation of this fundamental human tendency, in spite of the both theoretical and practical excess that can be found in different branches of Hinduism—among other places.

Independently from the efforts of sublimation by yoga and Tantrism, for the average Hindū, *kama* represents a value that has to be realized within the limits laid down by *dharma*. The asceticism of Hinduism, in general, would not say that *kama* is a negative value, but rather would intend to make man's consciousness and will evolve so that *kama* became undesirable.

We should not forget that *kama* before all is an eminently religious value, and as such replete with symbolism that charges all sexuality with a much more superior content to a merely psychological one or just simple eroticism—in the common sense of the word. The essence of religion is the sacrifice considered as being that change and even break of level, or that step from the mere worldly and temporary plane to the divine or eternal one. The Upaniṣads still consider the sexual act as sacrifice in its classical sense of "commerce" (inter-change) with Divinity.⁹¹ Sexual union is a hierogamy: "I am heaven and you the earth."⁹² Its realization is a cultic act.⁹³

Hence it is the sacrality of love that counts. And so this is not a question of "spiritualizing it," perhaps emptying it of passion and stealing its sex, as if doing/realizing it with the superior consciousness inherent to any sacral action. The great obstacle to achieve this is the merely profane and disconnected vision of everything that we have. When intellectual innocence is lost, it becomes difficult to believe it to be the religious value of *kama*.

⁸⁷ "The majority of indic doctrines coincide when defining the word 'value' as 'object' of desire (*iṣṭa*); but, as far as which object it may be, there is a considerable divergence of opinions. Therefore, Uddyotakara says that while some think that *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *mokṣa* are the desired object, he himself considers that value consists in obtaining pleasure (*sukhaprapatti*) or in avoiding pain (*duḥkhanivṛtti*) (see Hiriyanna [1957], p. 127). The whole of this chapter consists in a positive valuation of hedonism—something that does not mean that the opposite stream does not also exist.

⁸⁸ Very little or perhaps nothing at all is known about Vatsyayana Mallanaga, the author or rather the compiler of the *Kamasūtra*, whose date ranges between the fifth and seventh centuries after Christ, although it contains much more ancient elements; see also Jayadeva (1971), who describes the loves of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.

⁸⁹ See RV X.129.

⁹⁰ See AV XIX.2.

⁹¹ See BU VI.4.3.

⁹² Says the husband to his wife: "Dyaṛ aham pṛthvi tvam" (BU VI.4.20).

⁹³ See all section VI.4 of the quoted BU and CU II.13.1–2.

This is a delicate point in any spirituality: the role of pleasure on the spiritual path. *Kama* is usually translated as sensual pleasure, and this is not untrue. But it can induce the mistake both of “idealized” pleasure as mere animinic happiness, and of “materializing” it as a simple physiological sensation. It is not our task to make comparisons, but in general pleasure in India is exempt of this diffuse feeling of guilt present in some Christian spirituality.

Wealth—*Artha*

Perhaps a more correspondent translation for the meaning, in this context, would be power.⁹⁴ The other great human desire alongside pleasure in any of its forms is, indisputably, the desire for power, whose immediate tool is wealth. Aspiring to wealth is not considered to be immoral in Hinduism, and everything that wealth obtains falls into the same category.⁹⁵ Thus, the famous *artha-sastra* would be that treatise that deals with acquiring wealth (mechanical arts) and also how to reach the domain of public office (politics, economics).⁹⁶

The main duty of parents—that is, members of the second state—is precisely that of acquiring wealth to be able to care for their family and to fulfill the rest of their duties depending on their different social statuses. Wealth, here just as in many other civilizations, is a positive sign of spirituality and goodness.

Evidently, *artha* does not mean monetary wealth exactly, but rather agricultural wealth.⁹⁷ It is equally clear that *artha* does not provide power as such but rather prestige. We have mentioned the authority of *brahmān* despite their poverty. The wealth regarding this value provides, before anything else, the necessary self-sufficiency to attain freedom. It is understood that this is the value. Let us not forget that *artha*, in contrast to money, cannot be limitlessly or indefinitely accumulated. Hence, the word “wealth” could lead to some confusion.

Virtue—*Dharma*

Here, this complex yet central notion of Hinduism takes on the meaning of virtue. Man's aim is not only to satisfy his double desire for pleasure and power, but also it leads him toward acquiring that human perfection that enables him to be a man in full and still use and enjoy the other two former values, which are not aims in themselves.

Within our context (because as we have seen, the term tends to become ever more extensive and complex), the *Mahābhārata* distinguishes eight ways or modes of *dharma*, four cultic ones (sacrifice, vocal prayer, the gift of oneself and possessions, and asceticism) and four moral ones (truthfulness, patience, control of oneself, and lack of concupiscence). These are the virtues that make a man virtuous.

⁹⁴ The translation by Fillozat, in Renou & Fillozat (1947), 1.607, by “intérêt” is not very adequate either, although it does fairly stress the subjective aspect.

⁹⁵ The word *artha* means purpose, effort, work, object, and even thing. *Anartha* has the connotation of useless.

⁹⁶ See the delicious prayer of the merchant to God as if talking to another “businessman” to increase his wealth: *AV* III.15. See also *AV* III.20, which has the same spirit.

⁹⁷ Let us remember that “capital” (from *caput*, head) applied to wealth represents the number of heads in a herd, the same as pecuniary (from *pecus*, sheep).

Puranic tradition has seen the peak or height of *dharma* in truth.⁹⁸ "The entire universe is sustained in the truth."⁹⁹ The truth, *satya*, at bottom is the actual self, *sat*. Across the bridge of truth, *dharma* becomes the ontological order of the universe.¹⁰⁰

Here, we also come across a relative issue in the translation. Each culture represents a world that is the obliged framework to be able to understand what a word means. Each word is a symbol apart from being a concept, and the comprehension of a symbol demands the participation in the world within which the symbol is alive, within which it symbolizes. At the beginning we already mentioned something about *dharma*. We then translated it as "order." Here we have translated it as "virtue," and in fact, an "*adharmaic*" act is a nonvirtuous act. The connotations and overtones are very diverse, and with everything there is a network that unites them. We say "network" and not "conducting thread" because the relationships are not unilateral. Each word generates a force field, so to speak, in which every word acquires its full meaning. If "virtue" suggests force or effort (and even virility), *dharma* connotes cohesion, as we said. We could have equally translated *dharma* as "duty," and by doing this widen the semantic field of the word. The latter is another collateral effect of interculturality: it frees us from confusing words with univocal concepts and along with this the temptation of absolutizing our opinions, thus avoiding the danger of fanaticism.

If we add to this that *dharma* also can mean "religion" apart from many other meanings that we have seen at the beginning, it may be seen clearly there is not just one (single) concept of *dharma*; yet the plurality of concepts that express the meaning of the same word cannot be another concept within the same degree of abstraction—because outside of this we could say "human attitudes" or other similar concepts. This means that *dharma* is not a concept but rather a symbol and that we need to think symbolically. This is one of the challenges of interculturality, which I, again and again, have sought to make explicit.

Liberation—Mokṣa

Man's ultimate goal is supreme bliss, identical to the definitive liberation from whatever ligament of contingent order. Here, we cannot intercalate a monograph about *mokṣa*, the *parama-puruṣārtha*, the supreme value par excellence, the *summum bonum* to which human beings cannot but aspire. Everything in Hindū spirituality, the same as in its philosophy, comes about because of this ultimate goal of mankind. Also Vedantic metaphysics is more a theology of this blissful vision (said in Christian terminology) than a mere rational analysis of the ultimate structure of being.

If *kama* and *artha* secure a certain well-being in this world and if *dharma* is the guarantee of heavenly bliss, in a cycle that still has not come to the final and ultimate state of man, *mokṣa* as with *nīḥśreyasa* (which is beyond well-being) transcends the before-mentioned *trivarga*. In fact, it is ineffable and beyond bliss. As its very name indicates,¹⁰¹ *mokṣa* means the liberation from the cosmic cycle of existence, from the temporary *saṃsāra*, and the extinction of whatever karmic remains still bonded to the contingent order.

This being the capital pivot or flagstone of all Hinduism, it becomes understandable that each school may have developed its own theory on the essence of liberation. Without going into details we can say that, apart from the *carvakas* (materialists), all the other philosophic

⁹⁸ See Venkateswaran (1958), p. 2:289.

⁹⁹ "Satyamulam jagat sarvam," says the *BP* CCXXVII.22. See Venkateswaran (1958).

¹⁰⁰ See Panikkar (1971/12), pp. 235ff.

¹⁰¹ From the root word *muc-*, *mokṣ-*, which means liberate, untie.

and religious systems agree in affirming the supra-conceptual and ineffable character of *mokṣa* as the expression of the ultimate end of man. The aporia over which the Hindū mind churns is explained with the following: on one hand, liberation is absolute and therefore without the slightest hint of contingency or temporality or creaturability whatsoever; *mokṣa* is perfect union and unity with *brahman*. In other words, in *brahman* all is *brahman* and there is nothing, nor can there be anything outside Him. If the union with *brahman* is real, distinctions cannot be admitted in the core or bosom of Divinity without destroying its absolute simplicity. The "vision of God" cannot be the contemplation of God as an object of a contingent mind. The saint is the seer with the "Seer."¹⁰² There is no possible separation; the distinction would be only mental.

On the other hand, if *mokṣa* means liberation, it must be liberation from "something" that upon being liberated is united with *Brahman*. What is it that is united with *brahman* when the scales of *karman* or the veil of *māyā* have fallen? In any case, what is the "reality" of that which has fallen, of the *upādhi* (attachments)? If the answer to the former something is positive, then *brahman* is modified and increases with the arrival of these "somethings" that are joined to Him. If the answer is negative, there is no liberation from anything. In other words, how is human personality preserved if the union with *brahman* is taken with all its rigor? On the other hand, what kind of power is capable of maintaining creatures separated from the pull of divine magnetism once they have already crossed the threshold of temporality and left behind the realm of contingency?

Śaṅkara, Rāmanuja, Madhva, to give just three classical names, each make the effort to answer these questions according to their own system.¹⁰³

Needless to say, the *mokṣa* that we have been discussing has nothing to do with *svarga* or heaven as a place of transitory reward.¹⁰⁴ A certain Hindū spirituality does actually thematically distinguish between the subjective but perfect bliss or saintliness and union, or better still, total union with the Absolute: when a man dies he receives the deserved reward or punishment in another existence, and according to the current concept, he later returns to the earth or he goes to heaven, where angelic beings serve and entertain him.¹⁰⁵ But there is still more: at the last stage, he crosses the timeless river (*vijara*) and there he leaves both his good and bad actions. His reward has now been attained, and the ultimate abode represents total ontic nakedness, with no good or bad concomitant actions—and it is then that those who know *brahman* enter into *brahman*.¹⁰⁶ "Just as the fluvial currents vanish into the ocean, leaving behind any trace of name and form [the famous *nama-rupa*], as such does he who knows *brahman*, liberated from any name and form, reach the divine supreme Person [*parat-param puruṣamṇdivyam*], the effulgent [divine] Person [even] more exalted than the highest."¹⁰⁷ "Whoever knows *brahman* becomes *brahman*."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² See esp. *BU* IV.5.15.

¹⁰³ A monograph about *mokṣa* and *visio beatifica* would be one of the points where Christian theology would take more advantage of its contact with Hindū theology. I allow myself to point out that the Trinity has an answer to this set problem—not far from the *sat-cit-ananda* in Hinduism.

¹⁰⁴ The translation *svarga* for the Christian "heaven" has been and still is the source of lamentable confusion—on both sides. See I Kgs VIII.27, where it is said that neither heaven nor the heaven of heavens can contain God. "Coelum ergo est anima iusti" [Heaven, therefore, is the soul of the just] says St. Gregory the Great, *Homil.* 38 in *Ev. (Brev. Rom. XIX post. Pentec.)*.

¹⁰⁵ See *KausU* 1.2–4.

¹⁰⁶ *KausU* 1.4.

¹⁰⁷ *MundU* III.2.8.

¹⁰⁸ *Kath U* III.2.9. All of passage III.2.5–10 would be worthy of a detailed study for a theology of *mokṣa*.

True to our purpose of examining Hinduism in itself, along with its positive and worthwhile side, we should say that there is no reason to necessarily interpret these, and other analogical texts, in a pantheist or monist sense. The great concernment of Hindū spirituality is precisely in the experience of absolute reality not from *my* point of view—that is to say, the human perspective, from which it obviously makes no sense whatsoever to speak of loss of personality—but rather from the point of view (that with this it is no longer so much point of view) of the very Absolute. It concerns absolute reality having discarded “good and bad actions”¹⁰⁹ and having left behind “pleasure and suffering,”¹¹⁰ that is, having dispensed with our actual creaturability, searching for that which is beyond the just and unjust (*dharma* and *adharma*), independent from all possibility (of what is done and not done) and free from all past and future.¹¹¹ It is in the very Absolute that it becomes true that no one has “ever been born nor ever dies, who has not emerged from anything and nothing emerges from them. He is ungendered, eternal, perennial, primordial and does not perish when his body is destroyed.”¹¹² And the great mystery that the young Naciketas accomplished drawing out from the God Yama is that this Supreme Being, “smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest, is hidden in the heart of all creatures,”¹¹³ although it cannot be reached through any human effort but only through the grace of God,¹¹⁴ which rests only upon those whom He chooses,¹¹⁵ as the supreme *brahman* is immanent and transcendent at the same time,¹¹⁶ beyond any word, concept, or vision.¹¹⁷ “Except by that who says He is! How can He be understood?”¹¹⁸

The concepts of *nivṛtti*¹¹⁹ and *nirvāṇa*,¹²⁰ although the latter was later monopolized by Buddhism, complement the Hindū conception of salvation and that of total liberation. The great Buddhist text, the *Dhammapada*, describes *nirvāṇa* as being “supreme happiness.”¹²¹

It does not lack interest, although it may be schematic, to consign some of the expressions that the *Gītā* uses to refer to the final state. With these, once again it becomes clear what we have been talking about and the eminently scatologic character of Hinduism.

We have already indicated that the heaven of *brahman*, or *brahmaloca*, is not considered to be the ultimate end or final state. The latter is closer to *brahmisthitih*,¹²² or divine state or state of divinization. This is along with being united with *brahman* and participating in the *brahma-nirvāṇa*,¹²³ in the unity and bliss of God; it is imbedded¹²⁴ in Him, the Supreme

¹⁰⁹ *KausU* I.4.

¹¹⁰ *KathU* I.2.12.

¹¹¹ *KathU* I.2.14.

¹¹² *KathU* I.2.18.

¹¹³ *KathU* I.2.20. See also I.1.14; I.3.12 (hidden in all beings); *BG* VI.21.

¹¹⁴ See *KathU* I.2.20.

¹¹⁵ See *KathU* I.2.23.

¹¹⁶ See *KathU* II.2.9–15.

¹¹⁷ See *KathU* II.3.12.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ See esp. *MaitU* VI.22.

¹²⁰ See esp. *BG* II.72; V.25–26 (*brahmanirvāṇa*); VI.15 (*nirvāṇaparamam*).

¹²¹ *Dhammapada* (203 and 204, with other numeration: XV.6 and also 7): *nibbanam paramam sukham*.

¹²² *BG* II.72.

¹²³ *BG* V.24–26.

¹²⁴ *BG* II.72 (*śhiva*).

(one) (*param*),¹²⁵ the eternal and immutable state.¹²⁶ There is no return from this state,¹²⁷ perfect,¹²⁸ supreme peace.¹²⁹ The *Gītā* tells us of a divinization: *brahma-bhūtaḥ*,¹³⁰ of becoming *brahman*,¹³¹ to be converted into *brahman*¹³² through touching Him,¹³³ entering into his core.¹³⁴ In a word: liberation.¹³⁵ Taking refuge in God, without being afraid, as God loves us and total surrender to Him are what is expressed in the *Gītā*'s last message.¹³⁶

Interpenetration

Due in part to the influence of the predominantly Western conception of time as a linear sequence, the four classic *āśramas* are interpreted as successive stages in human life, representing the four stages of human growth, albeit clearly with the prerogative of one or other of the stages in the chronological progression.

In each chronological stage of life one state or another prevails. The young novice must first learn and study. However, the recognition from an early age of the possibility of attaining the fourth stage, *satnyāsa*, implies that in our present-day life we can, and perhaps must, incarnate the wisdom of the other stages. Consequently, the young *satnyāsi* is not a contradiction and the *vanaprastha* must practice both "detachment" and *grhastha*. In short, the four stages are more kairollogical than chronological and interpenetrate each other. According to the modern-day accepted rational explanation this represents a confirmation of the concept of reincarnation, i.e., the young *satnyāsi* had already gone through the other stages in previous existences.

The degree of maturity of a person does not follow a strict linear order, as daily experience shows us. A hermit can be extremely proud and a citizen as wise and mature as a monk.

Over-specialization is alien to the traditional spirit of India—despite the caste rigidity to which a certain part of Hinduism has fallen prey. The fact that time is not seen or lived as a linear sequence means that although from the outside it appears chaotic, it can be experienced as a liberating flexibility capable of developing inner maturity.

It would therefore be equally inadequate to eliminate the progression of the four *āśramas* and to consider them as rigid compartments. The traditional mentality is more flexible. Quantitative (mathematical) canons are not needed, but non-distinctions are fatal. This brings me to stress once again that, in order to understand a type of spirituality that is alien to us, we must look beyond the categories on which our own stands—although, if the language is to be intelligible, we must also transcend the mere rationality of words and experience them as symbols.

¹²⁵ BG III.19.

¹²⁶ BG XVIII.56.

¹²⁷ BG V.17 (*apunaravṛttim*).

¹²⁸ BG XII.10 (*siddhim*).

¹²⁹ BG IV.39 (*param santim*). Moreover, it is significant that here faith (*śraddha*) is presumed to be a condition to attain the ultimate salvation.

¹³⁰ BG V.24.

¹³¹ Observe the dynamic character of all the expressions in the BG, both in this case and in the use of the verb "go" in most of the places it is quoted.

¹³² *Gītā* XIV.26 (*brahma-bhūyaya kalpate*).

¹³³ *Gītā* VI.28 (*brahma-saṁsparśam*).

¹³⁴ See *Gītā* IV.9; IV.10; etc. Apart from the ones already quoted.

¹³⁵ See *Gītā* III.31; IV.15; etc.

¹³⁶ *Gītā* XVIII.64ff.

The Four Dimensions of Reality—*Catuspat*

"All creatures are a quarter part of him; (the other) three quarters are the immortal ones in heaven," states the famous hymn from the *Rg-veda* concerning the primordial Man (God or supreme Beginning).¹³⁷

Since then, the fact that *brahman* has four quarters is commonplace in Hinduism.¹³⁸ And when the identification has been made between *brahman* and *ātman*, it can then be said that *ātman* also has four dimensions:

All this, [reality] is *brahman*. This *ātman* is *brahman*. This *ātman* is quadruple [it has four dimensions].¹³⁹

Some interpretations have refused to see in all the *Maṇḍūkya* Upaniṣad anything more than epistemological theory.¹⁴⁰ Along with this, ignoring both the immediate meaning of words and the *karika* of Gaudapada without taking into account the famous commentary by *Śaṅkara* (whether or not it was actually written by his pen or simply belongs to his school).¹⁴¹ Moreover, the distinction that Mircea Eliade introduced, derived from yoga doctrine, differentiating between extasis and entasis,¹⁴² is later taken advantage of by the French school of comparative mysticism to distinguish supernatural Christian mysticism from "natural" mysticism, the latter not being Christian.¹⁴³ This distinction is generally based on the psychologistic interpretation of these four dimensions of reality.¹⁴⁴ The interpretation of that which is supernatural as being specifically Christian is nevertheless an unjustified *a priori* when it is applied to the interpretation of other cultures.¹⁴⁵ Nowadays, this theory is practically abandoned, without this reflecting on Christianity—even though there are repercussions of this in other circles of Christian theology, for instance, its superiority complex regarding other religions.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁷ RVX.90.3.

¹³⁸ See CUIV.5.2; MaitU VII.11; etc.

¹³⁹ MandU 2.

¹⁴⁰ "There is no such thing as an upaniṣadic epistemology," quite rightly states S. R. Gupta (1991–2001), p. 2:161.

¹⁴¹ See the pocket book edition with the three texts (Upaniṣad, *Karika*, and *Bhāṣya*) by Nikhilananda (1949). See more recently the magnificent translation and very important commentary by S. R. Gupta (1991–2001), vol. 2.

¹⁴² See Eliade (1991a).

¹⁴³ See esp. Anawati & Gardet (1961) (particularly chap. 2 from the second part by L. Gardet); Gardet (1948; 1954; 1958; 1970); Garrigou-LaGrange (1933); Lacombe (1937; 1938; 1949a; 1949b; 1951; 1956a; 1956b); Letter (1956); Maritain (1963; chapter dedicated to mystical knowledge); Maritain (1956; chap. 3: "L'expérience mystique naturelle et le vide"). It would also be right here to mention the vast work of L. Massignon, although it does not refer directly to Hinduism and refrains from formulating theories in general. We cannot end this footnote on contemporary authors without recalling the groundbreaking work by Maréchal (1924–37, with an abundant and useful bibliography) and also that by Gardeil (1927).

¹⁴⁴ See Guénon (1925), which dedicates a series of chapters (12–17) to describing these four states.

¹⁴⁵ See Lubac (1991) and the collective work of over eleven hundred pages *La mystique et les mystiques* (VV. AA 1964), whose title is already indicative—despite the great quality of its chapters. See as an example of the great technological advance the more recent work by Martin Velasco (1999). Very useful for our purpose (among many other works that would deserve to be mentioned) is the collective work dedicated to Masui (1981).

¹⁴⁶ See Zaehner (1957).

It is not our intention to take part in this debate or compare spiritualities but rather to describe some outstanding points in Hindū *dharma*, basing ourselves on Hinduism itself.

A theory of knowledge can certainly be elaborated based on the passages we are referring to, but this is not the primary intention of such texts, which exhaustively underline the four dimensions of the single reality that these different forms of knowing reveal to us.¹⁴⁷ In fact, there are no degrees of reality in Indian mentality. Reality is one. To say “two realities” makes no sense, if we understand by “reality” that which by definition does not allow a plural. To say “two realities” effectively implies recognizing in them at least one concept in common, which allows them to be as such—a merely formal concept, obviously. We understand by reality all that which, in one way or another, falls within the field of our consciousness—including the ineffable, unconsciousness, or unknown.¹⁴⁸ In this sense concepts are also real, but this does not mean they are the only things that are real, that is to say, they are to be identified with what is real—as if reality were only conceptual. This is the great temptation of idealism: fall into the vicious circle of uncritically accepting the “dogma of Parmenides” and identifying conceptual consciousness with thought, just as if all thought had to be conceptual. This leads us to identify thought with reality. That which corresponds to thought is not reality but rather truth. Thought is the organ of truth, not reality—although neither can be separated from each other. The reality or truth binomial presents us with a key to overcome a frequent misunderstanding between East and West. While India insists upon the unicity of reality and pluralism of truth, the West inclines toward the unicity of truth and plurality of reality: there are degrees of reality, but there is only one truth. In contrast, in India the truth possesses various degrees of depth that are revealed to us depending on the greater or lesser perfection of our consciousness. Therefore, degrees of truth can be discussed.¹⁴⁹

However, these grades are not just epistemological but rather they are ontological ones; so it seems to come back to the same thing, that is to say, to two degrees of reality. Yet they have a subtle, fundamental difference. The modern West, after Descartes, but above all after Kant, has split epistemology from ontology. The epistemic degrees are the epistemological ones—so called by this epistemology sundered from metaphysics. The ontological degrees would then be the metaphysical ones or those of the Self. The epistemology split from metaphysics would pertain solely to knowledge (of phenomena), and would tell us nothing about the Self and perhaps not even about the entity (the *noumenon*). The degrees of reality are ontical in regard to entities, but not in regard to the Self. On the other hand, there are also ontological degrees, revealed by a *logos* inseparable from *on* yet different from it. They are degrees of being or metaphysical ones, but that is not all. We cannot avoid this fundamental, philosophical reflection as we would risk adding to the cultural misunderstandings between the East and West—accepting the simplification *cum grano salis*. The dogma of Parmenides (the identity between Thinking and Being) could be accepted if it were “recognized” that neither Thinking nor Being completely exhausts reality—in other words, if both sides, Being and Thinking, recognized the reality of something inseparable yet different from both the Being and Thinking.¹⁵⁰ We are referring to the experience of the Void.¹⁵¹ It simply concerns the

¹⁴⁷ See *MahānārU* 12–17, where it is explicitly stated that the three states of consciousness through which we enter in contact with reality are “*brahman* without a second” (*MahānārU* 19).

¹⁴⁸ See the profound reflection by Zubiri (1962) on the subject of reality and the difference that it makes between cosmos and world—which we shall not go into at this moment.

¹⁴⁹ See Panikkar (1979/XI).

¹⁵⁰ See Panikkar (1990/33).

¹⁵¹ See Heisig (2002).

profound experience of contingency, that is that man “touches” (*cum-tan-gere*) that Infinite, Absolute, God, Reality . . . at one single point without dimensions, being conscious that what we are touching at one single point completely transcends it. Hence, one can become aware that both Being and Thinking do not exhaust the mystery of reality.

Having said this, we should add that a large proportion of the *Vedānta* has also accepted what we have called the dogma of Parmenides—since perhaps the latter represents the most dangerous temptation for the purest of intellectuals: idealism, into which, according to many exegetists, Śaṅkarācārya also strayed with his doctrine the *māyāvada*—that is, everything is apparent, although illusion (*māyā*) is only apparent if it is illusion of something which is not. We shall refrain from going further into this matter, since it does not really belong here.

Now the confusion can be explained, at least in part, due to the lexicographic divergencies between *veritas* (*aletheia*) and *satyam*, which could be translated for both truth and “that which is” (in reality)—from *sat* (root of the verb to be). *Satyam* is therefore one and multiple at the same time: one when it is to be (*satyam*) and multiple when it is the truth (*satyam*). This shows the difficulty of such speculations, which we should not continue with here.

However that may be, the important thing in our case is the following: salvation means “realization,” in other words, “arriving at” reality, “knowing it,” “being united” with it. It is obvious that if reality does not admit degrees, neither does it admit any becoming, and so, therefore, the concepts between quotation marks above cannot be interpreted literally. The most adequate approach might be to interpret salvation as the revelation of reality, a reality that was covered by the veil (*māyā*) of ignorance (*avidya*). On occasions this doctrine has been interpreted as saying it concerns a mere “revelation” of reality that was already there and cannot change. It seems to us that this quite common interpretation does not tally with the profound intuition of Hinduism. Hinduism says neither that this is a simple revelation of reality that remains unchangeable, intact and indifferent to human encounter, nor that it is an arrival at this reality, which as such is unchangeable and cannot grow, but rather a discovery of reality that, in spite of being immutable, is “really” discovered (and hence the whole philosophic issue) covered by a temporary and phenomenal state. It appears that the Hindū theory of the four states of *brahman* and *ātman* should be interpreted from this perspective, and from this point of view it could represent an important contribution to the philosophy of mysticism.

Before going on to describe these four dimensions separately we will mention some beautiful parables presented to us in the *Chandogya-Upaniṣad*:¹⁵²

1. Prajapati said, “The Self which is free from sin, free from old age, free from death, free from grief, free from hunger, free from thirst, whose desires come true and whose thoughts come true (truth, *satya-saṃkalpaḥ*)”¹⁵³—That it is which should be searched out, That it is which one should desire to understand. He who has known this Self from the scriptures and a teacher and understood It obtains all the worlds and all desires.

“He who moves about, exalted, in dreams—this is the Self, this is immortal, fearless. This is Brahman.” Then Indra went away satisfied in heart. But even before he had reached the gods, he saw this difficulty: “Although this dream self is not blind

¹⁵² CU VIII.7.1ff.

¹⁵³ *Satya* means truth and reality at the same time, as has already been said.

even if the body is blind, nor do its eyes and nose run when the eyes and nose of the body run; although this self is not affected by the defects of the body, Nor killed when it (the body) is killed, nor one-eyed when it is one-eyed—yet they kill it (the dream self), as it were; they chase it, as it were. It becomes conscious of pain, as it were; it weeps, as it were. I do not see any good in this doctrine.

“When the person in the eye resides in the body, he resides where the organ of sight has entered into the *akasa* (i.e., the pupil of the eye); the eye is the instrument of seeing. He who is aware of the thought: ‘Let me smell this,’ he is the Self; the nose is the instrument of smelling. He who is aware of the thought: ‘Let me speak,’ he is the Self; the tongue is the instrument of speaking. He who is aware of the thought: ‘Let me hear,’ he is the Self; the ear is the instrument of hearing.

“He who is aware of the thought: ‘Let me think this,’ he is the Self; the mind is his divine eye. He, the Self sees all these desires in the World of Brahman through the divine eye, the mind, and rejoices.

“He who knows that Self and understands it obtains all worlds and all desires.” Thus said Prajapati, verily, thus said Prajapati.

This anthropological fourfold experience of reality is not only an epistemological ascension but rather it corresponds to the four dimensions of reality themselves. The central idea of the *Maṇḍūkya*-Upaniṣad when describing the four states in question consists in presenting them as an explanation of the mystic word AUM, which contains within it “all that is past, present, and future”¹⁵⁴ and that “is identified with the *ātman* itself.”¹⁵⁵ We cannot enter into major disquisitions on this important introductory chapter to all Hindū mysticism, whose relationship with the Hellenic and indeed Christian *logos* constitutes an essential point to enable a compared mysticism.¹⁵⁶ There is need to stress the different anthropology and moreover the differing underlying cosmology of this latter spirituality. We shall now proceed to describe these four dimensions of reality.

The Physical World—Vaiśvanara

“The first quarter (*padah*) [of the *ātman*] consists in the patent dimension of the common man (*vaiśvanara*), whose sphere of action [whose world] is the waking state, who knows external objects, who possesses seven members and nineteen organs [mouths], and who is open to the experience of physical objects.”¹⁵⁷

Vaiśvanara or first foot (*pada*) of *brahman* is real; it is also *brahman*.¹⁵⁸ As the very name indicates, it is the universal man considered both in its highest meaning, and as such identified to *Agni*,¹⁵⁹ and in the sense that it represents what all men have in common.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ *MandU* 1.

¹⁵⁵ *MandU* 12.

¹⁵⁶ “In Indian philosophy *Om* occupies the same place as the *logos* occupies in Christianity,” states Ranade, not without exaggeration but without being totally wrong either (something still to be clarified in depth) in Ranade (1926), p. 333.

¹⁵⁷ See *MandU* 3 for a very useful cosmo-anthropological homology; compare the notes by Deussen (1963) in his translation of *CU* V.3ff.

¹⁵⁸ See *BS* I.2.24. See, concerning the whole issue, up to aphorism 32, where it is said the first state of *vaiśvanara* is also *brahman*.

¹⁵⁹ See *SB* X.6.1.11, which also calls it “person.”

¹⁶⁰ *Isva* means all, and *nara* (see *Anēr* in Greek) man.

The seven members of the macrocosmic body of *vaiṣṇava*, also known as *virat-ātman*, corresponding to the totality of physical bodies, make up the macrocosmos that we could call the physical world. There is a correlation between man's members and those of the material universe.¹⁶¹

The nineteen organs are made up of the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch), the five senses of action (speaking, gesturing, moving, engendering, and excreting), the five aspects of vital respiration (*prāṇa*, *apāṇa*, *samāna*, *vyāna*, and *udāna*), and the four superior or higher organs of knowledge (mind or inner sense [*manas*], intellect [*buddhi*], awareness of the I [*aham-kara*], and thought [*citta*])¹⁶²—although there is no uniformity in the translations.

We have already mentioned these elemental and succinct details to provide the initiation into this cosmovision, without the knowledge of which it would be very difficult to comprehend this kind of spirituality. We have already mentioned and again stress that we have to see them from the viewpoint of an anthropology and cosmology different from the dominant ones of our times. Thus, we cannot interchange or transpose the fruit and flowers of Hindū spirituality for our purposes any further without knowing the tree that produced them. On the other hand, knowledge of this tree represents a challenge both to bipartite anthropology (individual body and soul) and to scientific cosmology (quantifiable world).

Hence, the first dimension of reality is the sensory world, physical reality. All of this is no more than a single aspect of *brahman*, of the Absolute, of the Self, and it corresponds to the reality one has of reality when awake (in the waking state). To limit all reality to the one that appears in this empiricism would be, just as much in India as in any other spirituality, a grave mistake and pure materialism. Spiritual training consists in teaching man to transcend what is shown to him by both his inner and outer senses, and that the most profound reality is attained by transcending all that which is known to us by natural reason.

This is the starting point of Hindū spirituality: All that which we are able to be conscious of by means of "natural" knowing organs, in other words, that which we know when we are in the waking state, is only of any use to us as a simple introduction into spiritual life and should be overcome or surpassed, since taken as a whole it is but a quarter, and the lowest of the quarters at that, of reality. For instance, a lifetime praying, wherein we limit ourselves to employing only our reason, will never become true religious prayer; it will always be rational speculation. It is interesting to notice the impression given by Western spirituality to the Hindū spiritual man: however much a caricature this may be, it would appear that Westerners moved and lived within an existence reduced to a fourth part of reality. It is significant that the unconscious world has only been recognized for the last half century or so, with the great innovation of modern psychology—no less original or important for all that. But we have pledged ourselves not to dwell on comparisons.

¹⁶¹ The seven members correspond to the symbols of *ātman* and according to Śaṅkara to the sense organs. The *CU* counts eleven, namely, head (light, sky/heaven), eyes (the Sun), breath (wind), body (space, extension), bladder (water), feet (earth), chest (altar), hair (sacrificial herbs), heart (fire *garbhapatya*), mind (fire, *anvāharya*), and mouth (fire, *ahavaniya*).

¹⁶² See the summary of the traditional conception in *BS* II.4.1ff. There are numerous texts of the Upaniṣad (esp. *KausU* III.1ff.; *SU* I.4ff.; etc.), of the yoga-sutra (I.34, etc.) and many other Scriptures that together provide the basis of the underlying anthropology of this spirituality, which is different from the common Western approach.

The Ideal World—Taijasa

The second dimension of reality is revealed to us in the dream state, which we reach through our oniric activity.¹⁶³ This second sphere also contains the same members and organs as the first, but displays the world of subtle objects: this is why it is known as inner awareness (*antaḥ-prajñā*).¹⁶⁴

We have used the expression "ideal world" because, in a way, it represents the ideal sphere, approaching what Plato or German idealism might understand by "idea," but now is not the time to go into these intricacies. To simplify things we could say that there is a double basis for the introduction into this new sphere.

On one hand the Indian mind discovers the noncorrespondence between inner and outer things and our way of thinking about them. There is no identity between them. Thus, a way of overcoming this quandary should be looked for because until a certain unity is encountered, man cannot be content. Here, there are two paths opened up: the path of things and the path of thought; that is to say, greater value and consistence is either given to the things of the world or to what we think about them. This second dimension is an almost universal human tradition: that of giving more value to thought than to things, or, in other words, to trust more in the ideal structure of reality that our mind perceives than to actual things.¹⁶⁵ Now, we would not get very far if what we trusted in was simply our first thought about things. This is not only imperfect, but it is also dependent on the things themselves and, therefore, more imperfect than them. Thus here we could insert the original Indian speculation. We should purify our thought about things, cleansing it of our dependency on them. Hence, dreams appear to be the reality of an ideal world that does not follow the law of gravity of things. There in dreams, thought is lord and things adjust to the opinion of our thoughts about them: thus, the lordship of the world of ideas emerges. But it cannot be denied that, in spite of its initial independence from things, oniric activity, at bottom, is equally dependent on them. We combine many sensitive impressions. Hence it is an experience in transit toward a region beyond the "tyranny" of things, toward truly free intellectual activity.¹⁶⁶ The very word *taijasa* (luminous)¹⁶⁷ suggests to us that it entails penetrating into the igneous element of things, that is to say, into their ideal content, separated or detached from the residual traces of material appearance.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ See *MandU* 4.8.10.

¹⁶⁴ See Śaṅkara's commentary on the subject, which we will not summarize here as it would excessively burden this chapter.

¹⁶⁵ Allow us to adduce/furnish a text that conjures up this atmosphere: "Augustinus etiam ex platone dicit quod sapientia et veritas non sunt in hoc mundo, sed in mundo altiori, scilicet mundo intellectuali" [Also Augustine, following Plato, says that wisdom and truth do not belong to this world, but to a higher world, namely the world of the intellect] (Eckhart, Expos. in Eccli. [*Lateinische Werke* II.240.10]). That the truth is not found in things but rather in the intellect is, since Aristotle [*Met.* VI (1027 1) 251], a commonplace in all Western philosophy, but here it concerns the ontologicalization of the intellect.

¹⁶⁶ *Sandhya*, that is, "intermediate state," as known in the *BS* III.2.1 following *BU* IV.3.9.

¹⁶⁷ See Glossary.

¹⁶⁸ The luminous character of things does not fall short of Christianity, which affirms that God, being the Creator, is also Light (1 Jn 1:5)—light that is the life of men (Jn 1:4), that is the essence of all there is manifested *phaneroumenon* (Ep 5:14 [13]), because after all, everything descends from the Father of lights (Jm 1:17). See all the Scholastic speculation about the "Lichtmetaphysik," in the classical work by Baumeister (1908).

The school of yogic spirituality later based a complete technique toward the liberation of man on the subtle dimension of all material things.

What interests us in particular is the recognition of an ideal reality that is purer than the material one and up to a certain point independent from it. The ambit of consciousness is extended and does not limit itself to its activity of the waking state. Without going into theories on subconsciousness and unconsciousness, we can become aware of the fact, however, that the supposedly underlying factor of the *taijasa* is the trust in the autonomous function of the ideal world and recognition of the superiority of such a world.¹⁶⁹ It is very instructive to observe that while Plato, and along with him a large proportion of the Western world, separates this ideal world and gives it ontological consistence beyond the material world, in India it is not separated from man, and owing to this, man is able to live within this ideal sphere. It is the same problem, but with different accents.

Perhaps what the Indian mind has conquered to a larger extent is the greater amount of freedom experienced in dreams. A large amount of the limitations that are suffered in the waking state disappears in dreams, and oniric reality docilely unfolds according to our desires. "When one falls asleep one carries the matter of this world with one . . . and one dreams through one's own clarity, enveloped in one's own light."¹⁷⁰ Yet it is here that this dependence—not dependence on things, but rather on our will—provides the clearest proof that we do not have to do here with the ultimate dimension of reality.¹⁷¹ This leads us on to consideration of the following state.

The Spiritual World—Prajñā

"Where one being fast asleep does not desire any desire whatsoever and does not see any dream whatsoever that is deep sleep. The third quarter is *prajñā*, whose sphere is the state of deep sleep, who has become one, who is verily a mass of cognition, who is full of bliss and who experiences bliss, whose face is thought."¹⁷²

The two previous states evinced two merely external dimensions of reality. No dimension is strictly speaking homogeneous. We are not dealing with four more or less equivalent aspects of reality, or complementary ones either. Each dimension in a way includes the others. That is why whoever has succeeded reaching a specific dimension cannot now see reality solely from one dimension or from a lower perspective.

"When people sleep . . . they are united with the self (they have achieved pure being), they have gone to their own self [they have reached their own very nature]."¹⁷³

The goal of human desire is infinite, and this very infinity destroys any possibility of desire, so not only does desire entail the imperfection of not yet having the desired object but it also means not having accomplished possibilities that are yet still to be realized. Thus, the state of pure being, without any intellectual activity whatsoever, has been, from the times of the Upaniṣad, the model of the communion with the Self and the true form of being in which the object and subject have been identified with each other and, therefore, free of the dichotomy between knower and known.

¹⁶⁹ See *BU* IV.3.7–18 for a description of the dream state. See also *BS* III.2.1–6 for its Vedantic interpretation.

¹⁷⁰ *BU* IV.3.9.

¹⁷¹ We shall leave out the merely philosophical argument concerning the true distinction or nondistinction between the two first states.

¹⁷² *MandU* 5.

¹⁷³ *CU* VI.8.1.

Now, the reality revealed in this third dimension is not dispersed throughout the multiplicity of objects but rather it is unitarian (*ekibhuta*, which we translate as "unification" of experiences); in other words, the particular forms of things disappear as such, resembling more the simple appearances of one sole underlying reality. This same nondifferentiation does not allow us to describe this reality as other than a mass of pure consciousness without any differentiation between object and subject, and it is precisely this unification that brings about the active and passive bliss to which reference is made in the quoted text. The Self is spirit, that is, pure intellection and pure bliss.

When one has discovered this dimension of reality, one has discovered God, the Lord of the universe and brace of all created order: *Īśvara*.

"This is the Lord of All; the Omniscient; the Indwelling Controller; the Source of All. This is the beginning and end of all beings."¹⁷⁴

The discovery of God is not as such an effort of reason but rather a penetration into reality, forgetting human thought, transcending all intellectual activity, leaving behind the world of ideas and attaining that state represented by *being*, stripped of everything, in deep sleep, with no dreams, or desires, or worries. Only surrender to the Self, the total "*devotio*," is the existential path that leads us to the open door that reveals the Lord, the living God, very different from an immobile prime mover.¹⁷⁵

It would seem that this must be the ultimate and insuperable state of reality. Yet two different kinds of experience lead India to try to go beyond, to surpass what seems to be unsurpassable. The first of these is anthropological, if not also psychological. In the words from the *Brahma-sūtra*, it is the very soul that returns to the world of nonauthentic existence after having been identified with *brahman* in deep sleep.¹⁷⁶ No return would be possible if the union were absolute. The second reason is of an intellectual or even spiritual kind. *Īśvara*, Lord, and even God are all relative terms and consequently not absolute; they cannot be the ultimate name of reality without any reference to conditioned states. Moreover, the pure and naked Self experienced in deep sleep, in fact, has a negative aspect in that it cannot be experienced directly: we can only describe it either from the outside (watching someone else sleep) or afterward (speaking through memory). We shall leave to one side the place of "our" personality and how "it can be saved" in the ultimate reality. What in truth interests India is this same reality in and of itself, that is, the "thing in itself" and, paraphrasing Kant, "God in Himself." To enable this, we have to transcend both all "our" human perspective and any "relative" point of view, even in the core of Divinity itself. God is only God for us, in other words; for those who are not God, the Lord is not Lord of himself, the primary Cause is not "*causa sui*"—the cause of Itself. He or It is the "cause" of other things. Hindū spirituality has dared to penetrate this hidden path and has not flagged until "it surrenders itself" to the God hidden and above any name. "Brahman is

¹⁷⁴ *MandU* 6. An analysis of this marvelous text would require a complete study in itself. We only have to mention that the expressions used—*Īśvara* (lord), *sarvajña* (omniscient), *antaryāmin* (the indwelling controller, see *BU* III.7.1–23 and footnote 168), *yoni* (the womb), *prabhava* (origin), and *ap̥yaya* (end)—all have a long tradition and are ingrained into all the religiosities of the Hindū population.

¹⁷⁵ Let us allow ourselves to quote without commentaries: "Deus sub ratione esse et essentia est quasi dormiens et latens, absconditus in se ipso" [God as being and in essence is quasi-dormant and latent, hidden within himself] (M. Eckhart, *Expos. in Ioan.* [Codex Cusanus, 122.11.51–52], in Lossky [1998]). See also "Ubi et quando Deus non quæritur, dicitur Deus dormire" [Whenever God is not sought, it is said that God is asleep], and White (1982).

¹⁷⁶ *BS* III.2.9.

silence," states one Upaniṣad that, can you believe, has been lost.¹⁷⁷ Hence there is yet a fourth state: the silent one.

A beautiful Upaniṣadic text¹⁷⁸ states that those who have reached true contemplation "see the very *śakti* of God hidden in their own qualities."¹⁷⁹ The Upaniṣadic text is difficult to translate and it goes like this:

Te dhyana-yoganugata apaśyan devatma-śaktim sva guṇair niguḍam (It is through meditation and yoga that one sees God's very power hidden in one's own qualities).

The ultimate reality is directly visible in its manifestations. The "God in Himself" is a temptation of the mind that tends to turn Him into a concept. The third eye sees God seeing things. Discipline and contemplation are needed for this. Thus the desire to see "God in Himself" is a fallacy. God has no "himself": this would be an abstraction—the concept of God, a separate God.

The Transcendent World—Turiya

The fourth foot, or quarter, of *brahman*, on the other hand, represents three quarters of him, as we have already mentioned. The first three states reveal to us, so to speak, just a quarter of *brahman*, whereas this fourth state reveals the other three quarters.¹⁸⁰ Here we enter deep into the very inner life of the Absolute, as we have indicated. To enable us to do this we need, again methodically (to understand what pertains within the spirit of Hindū spirituality), to abandon and overcome our form of dialectic thinking. We find ourselves in a region beyond the third state of existence, unveiled in deep sleep. Faith, intuition, light, illumination, and realization are names given by Hinduism to the organ (which now is not a simple anthropological faculty) that allows us to venture down this path in search of the unconditioned *brahman*.

Caturtham [the fourth quarter, *turiya*] is not inner knowledge (*prajñā*) [of objects in the inner world], nor does it know the outer [outer objects] nor that which knows both either, it is not even a mass of [pure] consciousness; it is not knowledge nor is it non-knowledge. It is invisible, ineffable, incomprehensible, undeductible, unthinkable, indescribable. It constitutes the essence of the *ātman*'s consciousness, cessation of any kind of manifestation,¹⁸¹ peace, benignity [bliss, *Śiva*], without dualism. It is the *ātman*; he must be known.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Quoted by Śaṅkara, *BSB* III.2.17.

¹⁷⁸ *SU* I.3.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. The expression "*devatma-śaktim*" [The self power of the Divine (Radhakrishnan)], "die Selbstkraft Gottes" (Gonda), or rather, with a translation that betrays the spirit of a certain modern Hindū syncretism, "The God of religion [*deva*], the Self of philosophy, and the Energy of science" [*śakti*] (*Tyagisananda*) is yet very different from the *prakṛti* or nature of *Samkhya*, since the former is a principle independent from God, while the latter is precisely the divine energy or its crystallization in the world.

¹⁸⁰ See *MaitU* VII.11.

¹⁸¹ This seems to be the most exact translation of *prapañcopaśamam*. See Glossary. "Into which the world is resolved," translates Radhakrishnan (1953b), and "negation of all phenomena," translates Nikhilananda (1949).

¹⁸² *MandU* 7.

We could insert here any of the other apophatic texts that abound in Hinduism, but even without them one can begin to discern what we have to do with here.¹⁸³

If the first three states were really symbolized by each one of the letters of the mystic syllable *AUM*, this fourth state has no elements and would represent the whole *AUM*—the totality of reality.¹⁸⁴

It is clearly noticeable that the quoted text does not refer to an epistemological level, but rather to a deeper dimension, and therefore a truer one of reality, within which are contained all the other dimensions. In a certain manner, that is, from there itself, all the others become superfluous, since from this dimension they are unreal. "A relationship between what is real and unreal cannot be expressed in words, because such a relationship is in itself non-existent."¹⁸⁵

It becomes evident that only in a negative way and through "negation of all attributes, can *turiya* be reached,"¹⁸⁶ but it would be a grave error to confuse this with a kind of nihilism. It is more like absolute plenitude, which as such transcends all "differentiation between the knower, known and knowledge."¹⁸⁷

The important thing in Indian spirituality is the conviction that this sphere exists: it is pure transcendence. The "mysticism" of the I, the experience of the "Self," the auscultation of the created being, or, in other words, the experience of the above-mentioned "natural mysticism," ceases by definition at the threshold of this fourth state. It may only be stated that without grace this state cannot be reached, which is thematically repeated throughout the Hindū traditions of all times. We still have to see how human personality is "saved" in this state and what philosophical formulation is needed for this experience, yet what cannot be denied is the aspiring to the pure transcendence and total supernaturality of the unique and truly real unconditional *brahman*. It could be disputed whether man has the capacity to install himself in the Absolute and whether it is not vanity or madness to claim to be able to make the leap to that which is absolutely transcendent and "see" reality in oneself without any reference to the contingent being. It cannot be denied that the Hindū spirituality has tried and still does, and the majority of its theology moves precisely in this sphere, within the very core of Divinity.

The manner in which we have just presented the issue in the last paragraph shows that we still have not reached this ultimate stage, and what is particular about it is that the actual problem of man's salvation does not even arise. Man "out there" has no place: it would be pure anthropomorphism. "And on Mount Carmel."¹⁸⁸ There is not only no path but no traveler either—and the latter presupposes a path that is traveled by the traveler. The experience deletes both the subject and object of experience.¹⁸⁹ To state that there is no subject or object does not mean that there is no pure experience. How can it then be said? It cannot be

¹⁸³ To offset imperfection of any of the translation we shall provide another version of the same text:

That which is not internal consciousness (*prajñā*) nor external consciousness (of external objects), nor is it both, that which does not exclusively consist of a mass of (compact) consciousness, it is neither conscious nor unconscious. That which is invisible, inaccessible, impalpable, indefinable, unthinkable, unnameable, whose essence consists in the experience of one's very own self (*ātman*), that absorbs all multiplicity, it is tranquil and benign, without duality. This is *Carturtham* (the fourth quarter, *turiya*). This is the *ātman*, which has to be known.

¹⁸⁴ See *MandU* 12.

¹⁸⁵ Says Śaṅkara in his commentary on this passage.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ St. John of the Cross, frontispiece to the ascent to Mount Carmel.

¹⁸⁹ Panikkar (2000/XXVII), pp. 287–312.

said. It is only said that we cannot. For this reason it is stated that the experience is empty; it is an experience of nothing, it is not an experience (of-nothing). Language abandons us.

There is an internal contradiction when speaking of silence and discovering apophatism; it couldn't be otherwise. This experience cannot be talked about—and nevertheless a little less than universal tradition shows us that humanity has always “guessed,” “sensed,” or “envisioned” something like this and that this sense resists in being eliminated. Extremes touch. There is no (reflexive) self-consciousness in this state. It is the consciousness of the stone. *Brahman* does not know he is *brahman*. Who does know is *Íśvara*, equal to him. It is the same trinitarian or Plotinian dynamism.¹⁹⁰ All of this is uncommunicable, it does not pertain to the science of information or communication; it is based on prior communion.

Summary

Faithful to our intention to steer clear of mere speculation, controversy, and comparison, we are seeking to discover, in accordance with the four described states, the four levels of spiritual life to which the vast amount of schools in Hindū spirituality can be reduced. We use the word “God” as a symbol of reality, although others would rather say “ultimate reality.” As Radhakrishnan makes us become aware of when commenting on our text, it concerns a “super-theism” and not atheism or antitheism.¹⁹¹ Perhaps it would be better to say “Divinity” or “the divine,” but entering into this discussion would lead us away from our purpose.

The first level in spiritual life consists in discovering God in things in the sensory world. The path of action, *karma-mārga*, is the right path toward this state. God is manifested in all contingency; this is the first foot or quarter of *brahman*.

The second level is the path of innerness and reveals the nihilism in things of this world as they arise in our senses or feelings. True reality begins to appear beyond appearances. The leap is realized by love. Love needs support and requires an object, yet this is no longer of the world of phenomena. It is the path of *bhakti*. God is still in all things, but these are now not loved for themselves, but rather as steps that lead us to Him—and which belong to Him.

The third level is represented by the discovery of the Creator. Things are no longer seen in God, but rather God is seen in things. What is of interest are not things but rather God. What ravishes the mind is God as creator, as Being. This is the path of wisdom: the *jñāna-mārga*. Along with this experience of nothingness in things, divine plenitude arises. God harbors all and “is” all things. The power of love lessens because it finds no support. Intelligence becomes transparent because objects vanish. The world disappears, and God engulfs everything. Prayer has left behind thought and love insofar as desire retreats. Now, trust is not placed in the intellect, or in the heart. It is not placed in action or in the contemplation of anything, but rather in total nakedness.

Yet there is still a fourth level. At this level, God does not appear as Creator but rather as the Self, or, more accurately said, God does not appear—neither can we say He *is*. The umbilical cord connecting with creatures has been severed; relationship with the world is lost from sight. God is no longer Lord, or Creator. There is not even a God, since there is no one to be God for. Wisdom disappears as there are no objects whatsoever, and love remains still because there is no desire at all. There are no creatures; they no longer are. Experience is no longer experience; neither is the path a path, since there is no path or any travelers. The issue of personality does not arise, or that of the world, or creation, or time. Freedom is absolute.

¹⁹⁰ See *The Aenied* V.2.1., etc.

¹⁹¹ See Radhakrishnan (1953b); Swarup Ram (1980).

It is not even bound to the Self, as there is no Not-Self to limit it. There is total silence, yet silence also is not. God who now is not God, as he has no creatures, is within himself. There is no identity, because there is no second that can be placed alongside it to be the same as it. Infra-divine life begins. Life *ad intra*, the *sat, cit, ananda* . . . The masters fall silent.

THE THREE GREAT RELIGIONS

Tantra

We have said and said again that Hinduism is orthopraxis before orthodoxy. All our previous disquisitions will not provide us with an adequate enough idea of Hinduism if they are seen as mere theory. Hinduism, as we have already said, is more a group of religions than just one single religion. To keep it brief and for reasons of systematization, although the latter should not be seen as too strict, we shall divide the great religions of Hinduism into three, although these divisions, in their turn, could be considered as groups of religions, as on many points they very often coincide.

However, we are not going to describe these religions in their dogmatic aspect, nor are we going to describe them globally; we should be failing in our initial purpose of abiding with the *dharma* of Hinduism. The difficulty in the third section precisely lies in covering in a few pages what would really require a collection of books to cover.

As its name indicates, the *tantra* are the means by which salvation is transmitted.¹ A later interpretation, identifying salvation with knowledge, would say that *tantra* are that by which knowledge is transmitted. Thus, others have wished to uncover yet another root and translate *tantra* as being the origin of knowledge.²

Viṣṇuism

Viṣṇuism is that religious stream along with its countless forms that recognizes Viṣṇu as supreme reality, as supreme God, who, as every pious Viṣṇuist would still daily recite, has many *names*.³

According to Viṣṇuist *Tantra*, God possesses five forms, or more exactly there are five possible ways to speak of Him. Enumerating these will immediately provide us with the ambit within which this eminently pious, personal, and concrete religion moves. His first form is the transcendent and supreme one (*para*). The second one, which is grouped (*vyūha*) accordingly into four groups, represents the same number of functions of Divinity: Vasudeva, which symbolizes his very transcendent form; and Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha, names of the elder brother, father, and grandfather of Kṛṣṇa, who symbolize the different functions of God with regard to creation. The third form is the historical and physical descent of God (*vibhava*).⁴ The fourth represents God in His immanence

¹ Coming from the root word *tan*, which means spread, expand, extend, and *tra*, protect. See *teino* in Greek and *tendo*, in Latin with the same meaning.

² Then the root word would be *tatri* or *Tantri*.

³ The twelve personal names of God that belong to a kind of *sub-vyūha* (we shall explain this in the following text) are Keśava, Narayaṇa, Madhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu (here as a personal name), Madhusudana, Trivikrama, Vamana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣīkeśa, Padmanabha and Damodara.

⁴ The analysis of the same expression is interesting. See Glossary for the terms *Bhāva* and *Vibhāva*.

(*antaryamin*),⁵ and the fifth, as the visible and material manifestation, in his image (*arca*). The history of Viṣṇuism is long and complex.⁶

Although *Viṣṇu* in the *Veda* is basically a discrete figure, he is portrayed as having the fundamental characters that would later make him one of the major names for God. Apart from having emerged victorious in the struggle over who was the greatest of the Gods⁷ and having conquered the three worlds,⁸ he is compared to the sun,⁹ "dressed in beams of light" (*śipiviṣṭa*), but above all he is identified with the creator, Prajapati,¹⁰ and to sacrifice itself,¹¹ he is the very rite¹² and the embryo of cosmic order, the *garbha* of the famous *ṛta*.¹³ Out of all this emerges the friendly and personal character of *Viṣṇu*, which contrasts, for instance, with that of *Śiva*.

Viṣṇuism has been known by many names, each of which has a different historical origin, also representing a peculiar characteristic of Viṣṇuism as a whole. Among these names are those of *ekantika*, *sattvata*, *pañcaratna*, and *bhagavata*. The worship of Viṣṇu—widespread throughout India ranging from the Himalayas, with the famous sanctuary of Badrinath, dedicated to Narayana, down to the very south, with the great temple of Śrīrangam in the state of Chennai, dedicated to Ranganatha—possesses important temples, countless places of pilgrimage in Mathura (*Kṛṣṇa*), Vṛndāvana (*Kṛṣṇa*), Puri (Jagannatha), Kañcīpuram (Vadaraja), Tirupati (Śrīnivasa), Pandharpur (Vithobha), and so on. A brief description appears to us to be the best introduction to the world of Viṣṇuism.

Ekanta-dharma

Eka anta, meaning the one "end," is what Viṣṇuism searches for. This one end expresses the rigorously theist character of Viṣṇuism. Narayana is the one and exclusive end of man. This personal God is the destiny of the creature. All philosophies depending on Viṣṇuism underpin this personalistic character. The great *ācārya*, that is to say, masters of Viṣṇuism, such as Rāmanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha, and others, even when they are drawn to an absolutist philosophical concept with a certain monist tendency, have gone beyond it, thanks to the eminently personal nature of the religion.¹⁴ Philosophy in India is always theology.

Ekantika is also Viṣṇuism not only because of its one and only end but also because of the unique means it has to reach this end, namely single undivided love which contains within itself the cognitive element, which is more or less explicit depending on the tendency in question.

⁵ The importance of this concept is as well known in the philosophy of Viṣṇuism as it is in Śaivism. On the subject of its Upaniṣadic source, see *BU* III.7.1–23. A monograph on this point and its relationship with God absconded, or rather unexpressed (*avyakta*) from *Kaṭh* U 1.3.11 (see *BG* VIII.18.20–22) completing the references of Rawson (1934), pp. 135ff., would today be very appropriate.

⁶ Apart from the great philosophers Rāmanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha, Caitanya, etc., the *aḥvar* from Tamilnadu; the saints from Maharashtra, Kabir, and Tulsidas, and the masters such as Yamunacarya, Śaṅkara Deva, and Rāmānanda all belong to the spiritual world of Viṣṇuism.

⁷ See *SB* XIV.1.1 (later repeated with variations in *TA* V.1 and *PVB* VII.5.6).

⁸ See *RV* I.22.18ff.; *SB* I.9.3.9.

⁹ See *RV* I.155.6.

¹⁰ See *SB* VI.2.3.1 and, for greater detail, Gonda (1993).

¹¹ See *SB* I.9.3.9.

¹² See *SB* V.4.5.18.

¹³ See *RV* I.156.3.

¹⁴ For instance, just as the *viśiṣṭadvaita* by Rāmanuja does not claim to be anything but a sort of personalistic *advaita*.

By a simple play on words Narayaṇa is usually said to be not only the end, *upeya*, but also the means, *upaya*. The Lord is all, and the means to recognize whether something is good or evil consists in knowing if He finds it is pleasing or not.¹⁵

Hence there is also the importance of grace (*anugraha*) and its absolute power. It seems as if God were just waiting for some pretext to save souls.¹⁶ For this reason, grace is known as being natural (*svabhavika*) and unconditional (*nirhetuka*). This operation of grace is represented by Śrī¹⁷ or Lakṣmī.¹⁸ No Viṣṇuist worshiper would pay a visit to Viṣṇu at one of His temples without first having paid their respects and offered prayer to Lakṣmī, consort and mediator of all grace and pleader of all favors.¹⁹ The feminine spirit of the Deity is embodied within her, and she represents the great Mother, the cosmic energy that underlies the world.²⁰

Sattvata

The personal character of Viṣṇuism becomes accentuated when it is considered that this denomination indicates the name of the subcaste or clan of the *kṣatriya* to which Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa belonged, founder of the religious stream later to be identified with Viṣṇuism.²¹ In this way historicity becomes a feature of Viṣṇuism, although Kṛṣṇa later would come to be considered an *avatara* of God independent from the historic Vasudeva. This feature transforms this into a personal and consolidated religion, which is based upon loving feeling abounding in personalistic elements. Reason and intellect are factors of generalization and universality but, along with this abstraction and vagueness also, while sentiment and love are factors of individualization and coalescence, they could later become temptations of fanaticism and short-sightedness. All religious history in India could be rewritten on the subject of the creative tension between Viṣṇuism and Śivaism as representatives of these two invariable tendencies of humankind.

Pañcaratra

The *Āgama* or *Saṃhita pañcaratra* for a time equaled in authority the *Veda*²² itself. These are a succession of texts that contain a complete religious ritual that ranges from speculative works to forms of consecration of temples and images, celebration of festivals and practice of mental concentration.²³

¹⁵ "[Authentic] *Karman* is that which pleases Hari, [true] knowledge [*vidya*] is to [only] concentrate on Him" (*BhagP* IV.29.49).

¹⁶ See Mahadevan (1971a).

¹⁷ Śrī is an ancient although agrarian Vedic divinity—goddess of beauty and fertility, patroness of agriculture and happiness. Her very name means happiness, glory, prosperity, well-being.

¹⁸ From ancient times identified with Śrī and immediately connected to Viṣṇu as his power and glory, His consort and later as His *śakti*, she will be identified with Durga, Jagaddhatrī, etc., as the great Mother as in the case of so many other manifestations of the Divinity.

¹⁹ Catholic and Orthodox followers could think of the Virgin Mary, mediator of all grace.

²⁰ See Gonda (1993, and quoted bibliography), apart from the works that we quote referring to Tantra. On the subject of *Kali* from the famous temple of Kolkata (Calcutta), *Kalighat*, see Tucci (1940).

²¹ For an accurate scientific summary of worship for Kṛṣṇa, see Gonda (1960–63), apart from the work already quoted by the same author. See also Chandra Sircar (1958), pp. 2:108ff.

²² The non-Vedic origin of this collection is well known. Probably written around the seventh to the tenth centuries.

²³ To which a more or less esoteric *mantra-sastra* should be added. Many of these texts are not published or known widely.

At first it was probably a completely different form of religion from Viṣṇuism, although later on they would become related. Leaving aside its detailed or even summarized description owing to the fact of its immense complexity,²⁴ we shall just take note of the precise, ritualistic, detailed character of the living religions in India, and especially Viṣṇuism.

The very name of *pañca-ratra*, which means five nights, or rather five seasons or periods, is enigmatic enough in its own right for it to have been given the most diverse of interpretations. Its followers, according to some, had to offer sacrificial worship five times a year; according to others the name symbolizes the quintuple manifestation of the supreme Divinity. Very possibly, in the same name there is an allusion to the sacrifice of the five nights described in the *Śatapatha-brahmaṇa*, that is to say, the sacrifice that Narayaṇa, as the primordial man (*puruṣa*) makes of himself with the aim of identifying himself with the cosmos. With this sacrifice Viṣṇu acquires plenitude.²⁵

Bhagavatism

We have already mentioned that one of the most outstanding and above all popular elements of Viṣṇuism is the figure of Kṛṣṇa. Regardless of the historical issue regarding the emergence of this mode of religiosity we should first distinguish two very different aspects of Kṛṣṇa: the God in the *Bhagavad-gītā* who can be considered one of the most perfect descriptions of Divinity in all of its aspects, from the transcendent to the immanent, from the ineffable to that of friend and companion and, second, the God Gopala Kṛṣṇa, considered to be one of the *avatara* of Viṣṇu, whose legend has extended throughout India as very few others have done, and has become a separate religion.²⁶ Still within this second aspect we should distinguish the pure devotion of the *bhagavata-Purāṇa* and all the subsequent development in countless Kṛṣṇa legends.²⁷

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The advantages of classifications when it comes to concepts are simply obvious. Yet when it comes to classifying living entities one should be very attentive as not to imprison reality in aprioristic molds that may deform it. The previous quadruple division only has heuristic value.

The two characteristics we mention in the following belong to Viṣṇuism itself in general, and the first of these cannot by any means be taken as simply a speciality of this religion.

Bhakti

"The saints are my heart, yet I am the heart of saints. They know nothing else but me, neither do I know anything else but them," says one of the principal bhaktic texts, already quoted above.²⁸ Love, *bhakti*, is what is fundamental. Without love, everything else is of no use.²⁹

²⁴ This tradition entails 108 works, but there are at least 215 known (Schrader [1916] speaks of 224).

²⁵ See Schrader (1916).

²⁶ See Bryant (1978); Kinsley (1975); Wilson (1975).

²⁷ For the interesting and disputed issue on the possible Christian influence in *Kṛṣṇaism*, see Dahlquist (1962). (Everything seems to indicate that even though there could have been some influence, it belongs to a later period and, consequently, could not have affected the undeniable external similarities between both religions.) See also Vempeny (1988) and Venkatesananda (1983).

²⁸ *BhagP* IX.4.68 (we are probably in the tenth century).

²⁹ *BhagP* VII.7.52, and to be compared with 1 Cor 13:1ff.

We have already said something on the subject of pure *bhakti*. On one hand it forms a complete religion in its own right, with its own characteristics, and on the other it constitutes an element that a large part of Hindū spirituality as a whole imbibes.

The other manifestation of Bhagavatism is its worship and devotion to *Kṛṣṇa*, the dark-skinned God³⁰ that hearts fall in love with, who plays with men and demands unlimited and total love. Regardless of the issues of the historical *Kṛṣṇa-Vasudeva*, this figure first appears discretely in the *Mahābhārata*³¹ and keeps growing until acquiring the form of the unique and perfect God in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. God is, according to the *Bhagavad-gītā*, among other things, beginning, middle, and end of all creatures;³² source of all, yet not mixed with things;³³ cause of all without losing transcendence and immutability;³⁴ residing in the hearts of all men³⁵ and all creatures;³⁶ the ultimate support and ontological foundation of all;³⁷ eternal seed of creation;³⁸ identical to sacrifice and offering;³⁹ the ultimate end of all things;⁴⁰ salvation and bliss; strict love and desire within man;⁴¹ father of the world;⁴² our father, friend, and lover,⁴³ as men are but a fraction, a participation in him;⁴⁴ so on and so forth.

The fundamental element of devotion to *Kṛṣṇa* is the human aspect, some would even say too human, of love, that is sublimated or sometimes not, and is considered to be the maximum expression of religiosity. *Kṛṣṇa* plays with the *gopī* or shepherdesses and dallies with them in the most varied of ways, including in the most lascivious, in a large part of later literature. They represent the game of all creation and especially the human soul in its search for God and his love. Whether some of the *gopī* could be thought of as *Kṛṣṇa*'s legal wives, the case of Radha in later mystical literature aims to symbolize the most possibly intense love represented by the love between *Kṛṣṇa* and an already married woman,⁴⁵ a love that surpasses all obstacles and limits, even those of morality, prestige, and so on. The more dangerous, impossible, and passionate a love is, the more love is needed to maintain its flame kindled.

If passionate love is the characteristic of the devotion to *Kṛṣṇa*, serene, yet no less stronger, love is the outstanding aspect of religiosity centered around Rāma, the seventh *avatara* of Viṣṇu. All human virtues are embodied within him, faithfulness and love for his wife Sita,

³⁰ This would be the etymological meaning of the word, for which some have wanted to see a non-Aryan origin, something that is yet to be proved.

³¹ See *Mahābhārata* V.70.3; XII.341.41, as a simple man. In XIII.147, he is a hero and later gradually he is given more and more divine or divinizable names, up to the point of being considered as a theophany of Narayana in V.29; VI.23; etc. *CU* III.17.6 speaks to us about *Kṛṣṇa-davaki-putra* (that is, son of Devaki) whose identification with the son of Vasudeva becomes problematic.

³² *BG* X.20.

³³ *BG* VII.12.

³⁴ *BG* IX.4–5.

³⁵ *BG* XV.15.

³⁶ *BG* XVIII.61.

³⁷ *BG* VII.8ff.

³⁸ *BG* VII.10.

³⁹ *BG* IX.16.

⁴⁰ *BG* IX.18.

⁴¹ *BG* VII.11.

⁴² *BG* XI.43.

⁴³ *BG* XI.44.

⁴⁴ *BG* XV.7.

⁴⁵ For other, in contrast, his legitimate wife.

friendship and protection for his stepbrother Lakṣmana, loyalty for his country, strength in combat, truthful to his friends, perseverance when facing misfortune, even when it is due to man's injustice to man, and so on. The *Rāmāyana* in its different forms and throughout the different periods of Hinduism has been and still is one of the major sources of moral and religious inspiration of the Indian people. Valmiki, telling the story of a perfect man, made the people feel the need to transform him into a God.⁴⁶

Avatara

One important feature of Viṣṇuism as a whole and especially Bhagavatism is its theory of God's descent into the world, the famous *avatara* or created or natural forms of God to which we have already referred (*vibhava*).⁴⁷

Leaving aside scholarly references about their origin in the *Veda*⁴⁸ and their multiple interpretations in later different texts⁴⁹ and without pausing to describe the ten classical *avatara*,⁵⁰ we are primarily interested in describing the spiritual atmosphere of the doctrine of the descents of God as an expression of the divine providence toward man, or in the famous words of the *Gītā*:⁵¹

Whenever and⁵² wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata! and a predominant rise of irreligion—at that time I descend Myself.

To deliver the pious and to annihilate the miscreants, as well as to reestablish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium (*sambhavāmi yuge-yuge*).⁵³

⁴⁶ See Bulcke (1950).

⁴⁷ See also Glossary.

⁴⁸ See esp. *RV* IV.49.13 and the legend of *SB* I.2.5 connecting to the *XIV*.1.2 and to the *Taitt. Sam.* VII.1.5 and *Taitt. Brah.* I.1.3, etc.

⁴⁹ The *Mahābhārata* (*Narayaniya*, XII.349.37) describes only four *avatara*, while in another place it speaks of six (id., 339.77–99). The very *Bhagavata-purāṇa* provides four different castes (id., I.3; II.7; VI.8; XI.4), the first of which admits that the *avatara* are, in fact, countless. Other *purāṇa* speak of 10.19.39, *avatara*, etc.

⁵⁰ These are: The fish (*matsya*), the turtle (*kurma*), the wild boar (*varaha*), the lionman (*nara-simha*), the dwarf (*vamana*), *Parasurama*, *Rāmacandra*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Buddha*, and *Kalhi* or the *avatara* that are still to come and for whom the people are waiting. One can plainly see the ontologically ascendant character of this list and its dynamism toward a gradual divinization of the world or in the sense of a progressive theophany.

⁵¹ *BG* 7–8.

⁵² "*Tada atmanam srijamy aham*" [Therefore I emit my *ātman* (literal translation)]. The use of the verb *sri*, which means emit, emanate, create, set free, make fall (the rain). See another suggestive text: "Emite Spiritum tuum, et creabuntur, et renovabis faciem terræ" [Emit your Spirit and you shall be (re-)created, and you will renew the face of the world] (Ps 103:30, of immemorial use in Christian liturgy at Pentecost).

⁵³ "*Sambhavāmi yuge-yuge*" [millennium after millennium (that is, from age to age—each eon [*kalpa*] includes the four *yuga*)] I transform into a natural being (this is a being that has succeeded in becoming a being). See use of the verb *bhu* again (see Glossary for the term *Bhava*). The idea of incarnation is not directly suggested here but rather the idea of naturalization, and although it is formed from the same word (and its translation)—see nature, *nascor* (be born)—it could also be translated, "From time to time I am born (as a contingent being), I acquire contingent existence."

The religious meaning is clear: God directly takes care of man. He is concerned with the state the world is in and sends a manifestation of himself in times of need, a theophany to reestablish order. This is a true *avatara*, that is to say, a descent of the divine into the cosmos.⁵⁴ We have already said that this doctrine does not morphologically correspond to the Christian dogma of incarnation, although perhaps we can discern a partial homomorphic equivalent. The difference lies in the fact that the "incarnations" of Hinduism are true descents of Divinity. The *avatara* are truly divine and only apparently creatures, what in Christian terminology is known as "docetism." Christian incarnation is somewhat more than a simple descent of a divine "form" or mere theophany. The incarnated Christ of Christianity is the same Trinitarian Person that, being the "Only Begotten Son of the Father,"⁵⁵ the firstborn of all creatures,⁵⁶ and still of the world is definitively beyond death.⁵⁷ Christ is both truly divine and truly human.⁵⁸

All *avatara* theology is found in the verse from the *Gītā* preceding the one we quote above:

"Although I am unborn and My transcendental body (*ātman*) never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all living creatures and patron of my very substance (*prakṛtim*), I still appear (I am born, I become contingent existence: *sambhavāmi*) in every millennium in My original transcendental form because of my own power (*māyā*)."⁵⁹

An important aspect of the belief in the *avatara* is their temporal succession. If on one hand they differ from the Christian concept of incarnation that cannot happen more than once, because incarnation is not the simple manifestation of God in time, but rather the temporal plerophania, that is, a plenary manifestation of someone who has been from the beginning and will remain until the end: the alpha and omega of entire creation without excluding time—on the other hand the *avatara* differ from the *pradurbhava*, or manifestations of the Divinity that do not have any impact on their transcendence. Different manifestations of God can be coexistent because they are no more than divine forms that appear, aspects of the Divinity that reveal themselves to us; hence the different Gods are manifestations of God that do not exclude each other and do not contradict the unicity of God. In contrast, the *avatara* are mutually excluded in time. Each *avatara* is a savior for a determined period in time and has a message of salvation for man of a determined interval, whether it be temporal or spatial.⁶⁰

From the historical-religious point of view the *avatara* enable the combination of the unicity and transcendence of God with their immanence and many forms. There is no contradiction between a one and only transcendent God and his descent among creatures. We shall describe them (*avatara*) in order of their increasing subjectivity and waning objectivity.

Idols are images of the Divinity that, without being the Divinity, more or less suggest its presence directly, above all for those who do not differentiate between them.

⁵⁴ See Glossary.

⁵⁵ See Jn 1:14.

⁵⁶ See Col 1:15.

⁵⁷ See Col 1:18.

⁵⁸ As an introduction to this comparative work, see Abegg (1928); Bhagavan Das (1990); Jacobi (1923); Neusner (1951–54), vol. 3; Parrinder (1993); Schomerus (1941); Thomson (1956); White (1954); Zacharias (1952).

⁵⁹ *BG* IV.6. Here we have to renounce an adequate commentary on this capital text.

⁶⁰ See Ap I.8; XXI.6; XXII.13, etc.

The *mūrti* is a homomorphic equivalent of the icon: a consecrated image, which for this same act possesses a certain divine energy, to the point that it may manifest its presence. Its difference to the idol is very subtle and to a great extent subjective. Here is where faith appears on the scene, which is fundamental in all cases. Faith in an idol may be said to make it divine, and its profanation may be blasphemy that hurts and may even destroy the believer—although, objectively speaking, nothing happens to the Divinity. Faith in an icon or *mūrti* makes them divine only up to a point, and their destruction may have a harmful effect beyond the circle of “faithful ones.” The *mūrti* have a divine liturgical presence, that is, manifesting the act of their veneration in a sacred act. Some sacred images are thrown into the river after the *pūja*; Christian Scripture is “the word of God” within the liturgical assembly—not outside it, at least not to the same degree. The *iṣṭadevata* is a greater descent of the Divinity, insofar as the concrete form through which believers identify the Divinity and identify themselves with it, being conscious of the double direction of such a relationship. For believers it is the manifestation of God. In a sense there is a balance between objective and subjective. The *iṣṭadevata* is a true image of the Divinity, although with a degree of reality of which only initiated ones are aware. If a dog receives “the holy communion” it does not receive “the body of Christ,” remarks Thomas Aquinas.

The *avatara* is God himself who has taken on a living form in a real descent of the divine mystery. Objectivity grows in the *avatara* until being identified with God himself, but this does not preclude God from later descending as other beings. There can be a multiplicity of *avatara*. Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu, the true God: because of this his existence as a historical character is very secondary. The important thing is the Kṛṣṇa of faith, which is harbored in one’s heart. If the historicity of Christ is denied, Christianity is gravely harmed; if the same is done with Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇuist faith does not waver.

Incarnation is actually God that takes on flesh and blood, or better said *is* flesh and blood. There is no apparent or provisional “descent,” but rather it is God himself that is incarnated. For the same reason that if there were many Gods they would be the same God, if there were many Christs they would be the same Christ—although they may have different names and functions. It should be obvious that such a notion breaks with the idea of strict monotheism and can only be comprehended within a trinitarian vision of the Divinity.

Śivaism

Although *Śiva* is not a Vedic God,⁶¹ it cannot be doubted that *Śiva* is a continuation of Rudra,⁶² described in the *Rg-veda* as a terrible Divinity, and to some extent this is applied to *Śiva* too.⁶³ It is in this period of the later *Mahābhārata* that *Śiva* would gain significance and universality.⁶⁴ Just as the *Gītā* is the great monument to Viṣṇuism pure and simple, the *Śvetāśvatara*-Upaniṣad represents the magna carta of pure Śivaism.⁶⁵

⁶¹ The word “*śiva*” only appears in the *Veda* as an adjective, with the meaning of “kind,” “auspicious,” “friendly,” “benign.”

⁶² See *RV* X.92.9.

⁶³ See *MB* VII.19.35; XII.73.17; XIII.14.413; etc.

⁶⁴ Although *Viṣṇu* is still known as Mahadeva, great God, in the *Mahābhārata* 11.84.147, *Śiva* acquires more and more power. See XIII.14.33, where it is said that all beings belong to him. The legend of *ŚivP* II.5 is well known, according to which absolute primacy is endowed to *Śiva*.

⁶⁵ See esp. *SU* IV.19; VI.20; etc.

Leaving aside the unresolved problem of the possible pre-Aryan origin of *Śiva*,⁶⁶ Śivaism as a religion, in any of its multiple forms⁶⁷ being widespread throughout India,⁶⁸ worships Śiva as the supreme and absolute Divinity.⁶⁹ Absolutism, in all its aspects, is a characteristic of Śivaism that, unlike Viṣṇuism, pays less attention to compromise and syncretism. Śiva is Sankarācārya's God absolute, without qualities and transcendence. To be in communion with him, good will is not enough, but rather initiation (*dikṣā*), the second birth, is essential, since only those who have risen to the level of the Divinity are able to come into contact with it.

The figure of Śiva is extremely ambivalent. At bottom, there is a certain tendency toward the *coincidentia oppositorum* here, the only way to express this God's transcendence and absolute character—going from the androgynous Śiva (*ardhanārīśvara*) to the Śiva who is both awesome and destructive and to the repairing and creative Śiva, from the Śiva of the *lingam* without attributes, to the dancing and orgiastic God. This latter character is also countered by the ascetic figure of Śiva, such as the *Mahayogin* or *Yogīśvara* par excellence.⁷⁰ The *Saiva Āgama*, to an extent, have the common nucleus of all the different Śivatic schools. Śiva, the supreme Divinity, is transcendent and immanent, creator and destroyer of the universe with his strength that conserves it with its grace, which reveals it and conceals it. The schools can be summed up as six main ones: *paśupata*, *śaiva siddhanta*, *vīra śaivism*, *siddha siddhanta*, *Śiva advaita*, and the Śivaism of Kashmir.⁷¹ In the final analysis, its spirituality is focused upon acquiring the consciousness of Śiva, not as a merely cognitive acquisition, but rather as the supreme stage of all reality. We shall look at just three of its traits.

Paśupata

Although probably at first being a separate form of religiosity, the *paśupata* later became identified with Śivaism. In general lines it could be said they constitute the parallel form to the *pañcaratra* in Viṣṇuism, yet with perhaps a more pronounced yogic slant. Brought down to their simplest traits they concern saving the animal soul (*paśu*), from its bonding to this world (*pāśa*), with the aid of the master (*pati*), Śiva.

⁶⁶ These arguments would be the diatribes from the *RV* VII.21.5; X.99.3, against the worshipers of the phallic *lingam* and its interpretation along with some of the small statues found at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, as forerunners to the post-Vedic Śiva. These discussions have been exaggerated by the followers of the Hindūtvā ideology that bases the origin of the Aryans to proto-Indic times, as we have already mentioned. See the fortnightly magazine by Chennai, *Frontline* 17, no. 19 (September/October 2000): 4–16, in a serious description of the problematics that disallow the use that the Hindūtvā movement would like to make of it, close as they were to the government of New Delhi until 2004.

⁶⁷ We cannot describe the enormous variety and richness of the different Śivatic families, such as the Śivaism in Kashmir, the *lingayata* of Karnataka, the *śaiva-siddhanta*, etc.

⁶⁸ The temples of Amarnath and Karnath in the Himalayas, the ones at Chidambaram Kancipuram and Ramesvaram in the South—without forgetting the sacred city of Varanasi—are but some of the testimonies to the current vitality of Śivaism.

⁶⁹ For a modern introduction to Hinduism, see the extensive work of Subramuniyaswami (1993), its subtitle being an illustration of its character: "Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism," since, although centered on Śiva, it expounds and compares the collection of religions in India with other religions of the world from a Hindū confessional point of view.

⁷⁰ For a bibliographic initiation into Śivaism apart from the general works already mentioned, see R. G. Bhandarkar (1982); Chatterji (1986); Dhavamony (1971); Miles (1951); Nandimath (1979); Shivanpadasundaram (1934); Tiru Pillai (1948); Venkataramanayya (1941).

⁷¹ This latter is probably the most philosophically elaborated school and represents an advaita vision of reality that maintains the tension between monism and dualism. See Bäumer (2003b).

A whole succession of means by which to realize liberation and asceticism, sometimes of the most rigorous kind, characterize this path. For this very same reason this religious system, of a mostly exclusive character, in general eliminates thanksgiving. The pure *paśupata* form is not found these days; it has practically disappeared, although having left its influence in different schools of Śivatic spirituality.

The Śivaliṅgam

We do not wish to be waylaid by the discussion over the possible phallic origin of the famous *liṅgam*, vertical stones that constitute the maximum symbol of Śivaism.⁷² In spite of its visual form, the *liṅgam* is the aniconic expression of Śivaism, the *axis mundi* and invisible center of creation. Thus we must proceed with great care with the interpretation that is usually given to it as a phallic symbol. The modern vein of eroticism is far from representing the symbolism of the *liṅgam*. But this is not the place to digress on this subject. We shall limit ourselves to reproducing the feelings of a cultured and believing worshiper of Śiva toward the *śivaliṅgam*.

In the innermost part of Śivatic temples is the *garbhagrha*, which modern-day tourist guides usually translate as *sancta sanctorum*, a dark and numinous place where the Divinity manifests and to which it withdraws, a place that is sometimes considered to be the center of the world⁷³ and as junction between that which is temporal and eternal. There, placed on the *yoni*, stands the *liṅgam* as the true symbol of the presence of Śiva. A *mūrti*, the most spiritualized and purified icon, without form (*arūpa*) and nevertheless still visible, yet invisible at the same time. In the typically Hindū process of reduction to find God, this is the path of elimination of this and of that (the famous Upaniṣadic *neti, neti*)⁷⁴ and of all to encounter in the formless, nameless, being-less, nothingness, the last step within this world. This is the *liṅgam*. Now it has no form whatsoever yet nonetheless it is still there, now it has no name (*nāma*) whatsoever and however it can still be named. The *liṅgam* represents the pure symbol of those who have no symbol, the transparent manifestation of that which, emerging from the earth, that being born from the *yoni* of this universe, reaches back to the neverending transcendent region. Worship of the *liṅgam* is no longer sacrifice but rather adoration; the *pūjā* of the *Śivaliṅgam* is no longer an offering but rather a libation in thanksgiving and pure praise, that is to say, naked latria in itself with no posterior justification or ulterior motive.⁷⁵

The *liṅgam* is so bare that many times it is covered and yet its top is left clear for when the three or four heads of Śiva are inserted. But the true *liṅgam* is always unclad and with no

⁷² It is not always necessarily made of stone, and the living Śivaism of nowadays usually gives reverence to the *liṅgam* of the five elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. See Monchanin & Le Saux (1957) for the places where these *liṅgam* are encountered.

⁷³ For instance, the temple at Chidambaran down to these days.

⁷⁴ See BU II.3.6; III.9.28; IV.2.4.

⁷⁵ One of the purest forms of Śivaism is that of Kashmir, which is actually being revalued and of which Abhinavagupta is the main representative. See the different French translations by Silburn, nearly all published by De Boccard in Paris. A very useful introduction appears in German, with translation of a selection of important texts by Bäumler (1992). The translation into Italian of the major work by Abhinavagupta, *Tantraloka*, is the work of Gnoli (1972). Singh Jaideva (1980a) has translated and commented upon the *Śivasūtra*, "The Yoga of Supreme Identity," apart from other texts by Abhinavagupta. For one of the few works in Spanish on the aesthetics of the Śivaism of Kashmir, a translation of various texts beginning with fragments of the *Nāṭya śāstra* about *rasa* (pleasure, literally juice, lymph, taste, and thus feeling), see Maillard & Pujol (1999).

adornments. Moreover, it is precisely by means of the *lingam* that lesser idolatry is combated.⁷⁶ Idolatry has not effected the necessary separation, or more strictly speaking it has not effected the distinction between God and the world. Worshiping God by worshipping a piece of the world. Worship of *Śivalingam*, as the lightning rod makes us transcend the world and points us in the direction of the transcendent, without separating it completely from this world, without breaking the tension. The *lingam*, in fact, usually of stone, still contains within it all the telluric charge of the icon but without the dead weight of form. We should differentiate between idolatry and iconolatry.⁷⁷

The Dance of Śiva—Nāṭarāja

When the multitude of faithful ones, congregated in the great hall at the temple of Chidambaram, asked Manikkavacakar (one of the great Śivatic saints in Southern India, a poet inspired by the power of love for his personal God in the figure of Śiva, and the highest scale of thaumaturgical life) about the meaning of his inspired hymns, the saint simply pointed to the image of Nāṭarāja, the dancing figure of Śiva, saying, "He is the meaning of my chants," and then vanished in a beam of light uniting himself with the Divinity.⁷⁸

Again leaving to one side the scholarly disquisition on the origin of the worship to Śiva as "the king of dance," Nāṭarāja,⁷⁹ we will proceed to describe the religious sentiment that is still alive in Śivaism these days.

Above all the divine dance symbolizes the plenitude of God, who does not need anything or any creature to enjoy his own infinity and glory. God is supreme bliss, self-sufficient and absolute. God is happy because he is plenitude in himself, he dances because he has no task to fulfill. The actual dance is not the expression of desire or the tendency to obtain anything but rather the explosion of inner plenitude and manifestation of internal bliss. Nāṭarāja, the king of dance, is the God of glory. There is perhaps no other symbol of the Divinity that penetrates so deeply within the divine being. Dance is the revelation, the unveiling of the very intra-divine life itself. God expresses himself to himself.

Yet there is still more. Nāṭarāja's dance is also the cosmic dance, divine manifestation *ad extra*. The outward divine act is not marked by the imprint of necessity, neither is it characterized by any kind of degradation. The supreme Being is not seen to be obliged to carry out this divine act, nor is the act a condescension of God, who, full of mercy and compassion, wishes to do good outwardly. Creation is not a divine necessity, neither is it a kind of charity, an act unworthy of God, stooping and debasing himself to create creatures: it is, on the contrary, a divine dance, an expansion of his glory, an explosion of his exuberance, a gracious gift (grace in all the meanings of the word) undertaken for mere pleasure, for exclusive love, for a unique inner impulse of bliss and unfolding of his own divine happiness.

⁷⁶ This kind of worship "has been refined, becoming in an abstract symbol, for the reaction against idolatry," says Renou in Renou e Filliozat (1947), I:1062. More than "abstract" perhaps it would be more apt to say "dynamic" or "spiritual."

⁷⁷ See Panikkar (1998/XXII), pp. 38–45.

⁷⁸ See on the subject of the life of the founder of the *sat-mārga*, one of the four traditional paths of Śivaism, Mahadevan (1971b). Manikkavacakar (*Marikka Vasahar*) is one of the four *acarya* in Tamil Śivaism. See Kingsbu & Phillips (1921) and Hopkins (2002).

⁷⁹ The *tandava*, described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is an ecstatic dance, accompanied by "dæmons," on the body of a rebel demon. See Coomaraswamy (1985).

Creation is *lilā*, that is to say, a divine game, a blissful “pastime” of God, the supreme Being’s sport, who is entertained by and enjoys making beings participants in his divine glory—beings who, because of this very unfolding of God’s glory, come into being. Moreover, creation as a whole is not only God’s *lilā*, it is also “play” in itself. All the dynamism of the created world, all the tension in the universe, all the sense that human life is nothing other than a divine game, a supernatural sport in which beings can participate to enjoy divine beatitude and become worthy playmates for God. He who in the explosion of his beauty sends flashes of his very Being toward the surrounding void and the darkness that beyond Him would exist were he not to take the time to send, like a barrage of fireworks, his own luminous beams for his own “enjoyment” and bliss, and for the “enjoyment” of the flashes that He produces. Everything in life is a game, and faith consists in revealing it, becoming aware of the experience that there is nothing definite, except the very steps of the dance through which they are enabled to penetrate into the core of the Divinity, from which, like nonexistent sparks, we have departed, excusing the anthropomorphic language to which our culture obliges us.

Here we are not really dealing with human dance but rather divine dance, not so much the dance’s cultic character, dance as sacrifice, but rather as a sacrament, in other words, as a divine manifestation.⁸⁰ Śiva’s cosmic dance with its primordial rhythm gives rise to the five traditional cosmic powers. It is through, and in, the dance as Śiva, the effulgent and terrible, the benign and severe, that the five cosmic actions (*pañca-kṛtya*) are realized: production, conservation, destruction, divinizing descent, and liberation. The dancing God casts out the world from himself, thus creating it. Once it is “out” he conserves it by making it take part and participate in the rhythm of his dance, a rhythm that nevertheless *in crescendo* goes as far as to inebriate the creature and destroy it. Next comes the fourth moment in which it is God himself who sustains the now divine tempo of the dance in the transcendent order, in the state in which no created being alone is able to keep up this divine rhythm and eventually when the soul, in this centrifugal movement, has cast away and eliminated all the rest of its creature ability (*māyā*), then, total liberation arises, the dance comes to an end. Here the soul really and truly discovers that all has only been a dance step and that in fact everything has been just a case of waiting and hoping in the “cauldron” of the cosmic symphony of reality.

We have preferred to express ourselves symbolically rather than taking the time to describe the underlying philosophy. Let us say that in differing from a specific vedantic spirituality with monist tendencies, Śivaism, especially that of its great representatives in Kashmir, is restrictively *advaita*, a-dualist. This means that not only does it not deny perceptible reality but it does not relegate it to the background—hence its relationship with the third great group of religions in India, which we shall be looking at next.

Śaktism

Śaktism is the third *Tantra*, and it could be said that it constitutes the *tantra* par excellence, to the point where Tantrism has nearly become a synonym of śaktism. Strictly speaking, śaktism in its own right, more than a religion or group of religious forms, as we pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, constitutes an essential dimension of all kinds of religion, and

⁸⁰ This would be a difference with *lilā* in Kṛṣṇaism, where it is first primarily a theandric game in Kṛṣṇa and later a human one in the souls in love with him. The *lilā* concept extends well beyond the Śivatic Viṣṇuist worlds. See Bäumer (1969), H. Rahner (1990), etc.

of course all the religions included in Hinduism. We shall consider it from these two aspects separately, that is to say, as being eminently cultic on one hand, and the cultic aspect of all religion on the other. We might add that in the first aspect śaktism represents *the worship in all religions* and, in the second, *the religion of worship*.

To say that the term *śakti* appears in the *Rg-veda* serves as an introduction to broaden upon the theme. It appears as a kind of creating principle that a God may use for his action.⁸¹ The very divine presence in the world, insofar as the divine power underpins all, is also known as *śakti*.⁸² This divine omnipotence is linked to its omnipresence.⁸³ Moreover, God in the world is his *śakti*, his power.

In the final analysis, the theological-philosophical reason that introduces and justifies *śakti* seems to us to be the following: God, insofar as being the supreme Being, is immutable and transcendent, but on the other hand has to have some kind of relationship with the world, since, in one way or another, the world is work of the Divinity. God has to deal with the world, but he cannot get his hands dirty, so to speak, by coming into contact with it. *Śakti* as divine "power" is his intermediate agent, a power that would later be embodied and considered as being God's consort. If we were to express ourselves Aristotically, we could perhaps go on to say that the *śakti*, as the metaphysical complement to *Īśvara*,⁸⁴ represents the *causa materialis* of the world, alongside the *efficientes* represented by *Īśvara*.

With his Power, God is everywhere and is all insofar as all is none other than his manifestation. The contemplative soul discovers things as they really are and furthermore, when perforating appearances, encounters God concealed within his own manifestations (*sva-guṇaib*).⁸⁵ The divine *śakti* is that which allows Hinduism to connect God and the world without the necessity of falling into either of the two extremes: monism or dualism. "Without his *śakti*, Śiva is just a cadaver," states a Tantric text.⁸⁶ Many of the *aporias* of dialectic thought would fall flat if the so-called divine omnipotence were interpreted as omnipresence.

A fundamental characteristic of all śaktism is its concretion and indeed materiality, without any fear of compromising divine transcendence, ineffability, or immutability. Śaktism is eminently realist, and nonetheless, that does not mean it is dualist. In fact, śaktism emerges alongside the most rigorous of monisms as a sort of compensation and complement. With this, śaktism represents the human and immanent pole of all religion. So its enormous diffusion in Hinduism and its insertion into all other religions is not at all odd.⁸⁷ Not without

⁸¹ See *RV* VII.68.8, where it is because of *śakti* that the waters rise.

⁸² See *RV* X.88.10, where it is described that *Agni* replenishes the world with his *śakti*.

⁸³ See the Christian Scholastic notion of divine presence through "potency." See, esp., Thomas Aquinas, *Sum. theol.* I.q. 8.a.3; and the notion of "energies" of Orthodoxy, for which see Lossky (1982), pp. 51ff.

⁸⁴ Schrader (1916), p. 29.

⁸⁵ "*Sva-guṇaib*" [in his own *guṇa*] is in fact an instrumental. God conceals himself by means of his own manifestations, he covers himself up with the same veil with which he manifests himself. If God should totally reveal himself, if he were discovered in an absolute manner, he would be completely invisible. God is an absconded Being and cannot cease from being so. See the beautiful and parallel text that speaks of God as being hidden in all things: *sarva-bhutesu gudham* (*SU* VI.15–17). In the Upaniṣad there is a very profound co-relationship between the *deus absconditis* and the *deus intimus*. A monograph on the subject of the Christian Trinity and *Brahman*, *Īśvara* and *śakti* is a study that is still just beginning. See an outline of a partial problem in Panikkar (1961/5).

⁸⁶ Kubjika Tantra in Gonda (1960–63).

⁸⁷ A monographic study is needed on the subject of the *śakti* and divine energies of Patristic Greek

reason it has come to be known as a pan-Indian fashion.⁸⁸ In fact Tantrism is quite often considered as forming part of *śruti*, that is to say, revelation, hence alongside the *Veda*,⁸⁹ it would be *gama* and not *nigama*.

Śaktic realism clears the way for the method of reintegration as the general path for human salvation. In śaktism salvation is not so much liberation, being understood as escapism from matter or from the world, as penetration and "redemption" of the body and of matter by the spirit, although these expressions should not be understood from the current Western sense, since here it is a question not so much of overcoming dualism as of its spiritualization. The characteristic ideal of *liberation* in India has been counterposed to the ideal of *liberty* in the West, adding that this difference does not apply to Tantrism, which from this viewpoint should be classified as being purely Western.⁹⁰ Others rightly take note of the fact that the great difficulty to get adequately close to Tantrism in particular and Indic spirituality in general, for the modern Westerner, lies in the latter's individuality:

Someone Tantric is not very aware of himself—his search is not personal, it is not an individual search, but rather an experience of the mystery of the world and the cosmos. Namely, an experience that is more important than individual liberty, than individual right.⁹¹

Perhaps a large section of contemporary spirituality, even in a Christian ambit, comes close to this revaluation of matter and the body, and to the recovery of man's primordial state, lost because of the original sin. All the theory of the Evagrius prayer, for instance, is dominated by this idea, that at the beginning the revelation of the Spirit was the very light of intelligence and this latter the guide of the senses. Prayer consists in recovering the heavenly state.⁹² Symeon the New Theologist could present us with another example.⁹³ But, now, following these offshoots is not our concern.⁹⁴

In accordance with its nonspeculative character, śaktism, has no theory on the subject of the original state of man and his method of reintegration; it is presented more as original intemporal perfection.⁹⁵ What in Christianity could be called return to the bosom of God, in śaktism would be known as a penetration of God, of the *śakti* of God, into man and into the world—a descent of God rather than an ascent to Him.

For reasons of terminological clarity, even though this division can never be taken literally, we shall call śaktism, properly speaking, the form of religiosity pertaining to the different religions that could be denominated śaktic religions, and Tantrism to cultic religiosity widespread throughout all religion and in particular Hinduism.

spirituality, both before and after breaking with the West. This is the problem of the Trinity and Christ, pushed into the background in Christian tradition—with honorable exceptions.

⁸⁸ See Eliade (1991a), chap. 6. See as an example Bolle (1962), pp. 128–42—although these "elements" can be found in the works of most Indian writers.

⁸⁹ The Tantras are usually known as *śrutiśakhaśiṣaśah* [particular branches of revelation].

⁹⁰ Evola (1971), p. 288.

⁹¹ Nayak (2001), p. 125.

⁹² See, esp., Centurias III.55.

⁹³ See, esp., Symeon, *Orat.* 57 (PG 120.297) and also Vita Symeon, 4:7, etc.

⁹⁴ See Lossky (1982).

⁹⁵ See Holdrege (1998), pp. 341–86, including an abundant bibliography.

Śaktism as the Religion of Worship

The fundamental category of śaktism is the *sadhana*.⁹⁶ It is usually translated as “realization.” The *sadhaka* is properly speaking he who has attained this realization—although in current technical language it simply means “initiate.”⁹⁷

In saying that śaktism is pure worship we mean to express that its central concern, and in fact the only one, is the attainment of the end, the realization of the goal, the arrival at salvation. Śaktism is less concerned than other religious forms with providing a theoretical format for its praxis. The only thing that śaktism affirms is the path or paths in the most concrete fashion of action to enable one to succeed in reaching such salvation. Śaktism is pure worship, which is simple salvific action. The whole of the vast amount of śaktic literature does nothing other than describe what one should do, in each case, to attain the ultimate end for man.

Needless to say, śaktism, like any other religious form, has latent and implicit concepts, yet, in contrast to other religions, it is not concerned with making them explicit.

When seeking to be explicit about some of these concepts we may come across the following characteristics:

*The priority of experience over theoretical knowledge.*⁹⁸ Some authors make the distinction between *viñāna* being experience and *jñāna* being *epistémé* or speculative science, although the Sanskrit term is somewhat imprecise with these words.⁹⁹ The truth is that śaktism, as we have mentioned, insists on personal experience, which can only be obtained if there is ritual orthopraxis. An ancient Upaniṣad,¹⁰⁰ for instance, describes the female body as the sacrificial altar and the image of the macrocosmos. Śaktism would construct an extremely elaborate and complete rite to transform it into personal experience. In all cases śaktism does not turn its back on experimenting to attain experience. What it obviously does demand is great preparation (initiation, purification, etc.) of the person who experiences. The theoretical presupposition of this approach is, naturally, that this world is real and that the celebrated mental sacrifices in the *Vedānta* are not sufficient to enable us to attain realization.

The principle of polarity is perhaps the second presupposition of śaktism. Reality as a whole effectively has this undeniable bipolar nature: Being (*sat*) and Not-being (*asat*), subject and object, consciousness (*cit*) and ignorance (*avidyā*), the I (*aḥam*) and that (*idam*), pleasure and pain, male and female, the spirit and the flesh, and so forth. In short, we are talking about Śiva and his śakti or, in general terms, God and his power or energy; or, in philosophical language, eternity and time, the transcendent and this world, the absolute and the relative.¹⁰¹

The principle of the positive reconquest of unicity seems to us to be the third fundamental hypothesis of śaktism. We say positive because seeking to recover unicity, or at least, reaching it, is a little short of being a general religious principle. If we restrict ourselves to India, although our reflection is also valid beyond the limits of Hinduism, we could say there are two different methods of recovering unicity, one *negative* and the other *positive*.

⁹⁶ See Glossary.

⁹⁷ See Varenne (1997).

⁹⁸ See Nayak (2001), who quotes a poet of the eighteenth century alluded to by Rāmakrishna Paramahansa: “I would like to taste the honey not become honey.”

⁹⁹ See Panikkar (1997/XXXIX), pp. 124–31.

¹⁰⁰ BU VI.4.

¹⁰¹ On the subject of *Śiva* and *śakti*, see the Spanish translation by Zimmer (1995) and in general all the work by this great Indologist. Mircea Eliade’s main interest in Hinduism also concentrated on *śaktism* (seen more as a religion than a philosophy, more as orthopraxis than orthodoxy), although, as we have mentioned, these issues are a little artificial and not very indicative.

The path of pure negation is the classical method of the *māyā vada*, typical of the predominantly philosophical *Vedānta*. The famous Upaniṣad “*neti neti*” might be its simplest expression.¹⁰² Strictly speaking it does not concern the recovery but simply of the discovery of the one reality that has always been, even where this was not recognized. It concerns rather the radical negation of the *asat*, of the Not-self, of the recognition of the unreality of the *upādhi*, of the illusory adherences that have stuck to the Self. The sacrifice of the *Veda* has been interiorized to such an extent that it is not content with recognizing the primacy of inner and intellectual sacrifice as in the Upaniṣad, but rather it has become a simple awareness of eternal reality, having eliminated any possibility of ontological action.

On the contrary, the positive method is the one that is typical in śāktism. It could also be known as the path of sublimation. In śāktism the reconquest is real; it concerns a path of realization. Salvation is not seen as a simple discovery but rather as a true realization of reality. Polarity is sublimated by the union of all opposites. Śāktism is a path of integration. It does not wish to miss anything, or leave anything behind. In śāktic realism the physical world and the human body are real, in contrast to the idealism of a certain monist strand of the *Vedānta* that states that the world is inconsistent and, when everything is said and done, at bottom, unreal. Here, we could relate the sacramental notion of the universe and śāktic spirituality—a point we might just bear in mind.

The principle of regressive integration, in the fourth place, makes up the most proper characteristic. Based on the axiom that integration should be achieved by the same means as those that brought about its disintegration, śāktism takes it to its most extreme circumstances. This principle of regressive integration means that the same event that led to sin would be the regenerating medicine. When one trips over and falls to the floor, it is the same floor that enables one to arise.¹⁰³

According to śāktic terminology man passes through three states (*bhāva*): *paśu* (animal) or the soul bonded to this world, *vīra* (man) or heroic state, and *divya* or divine state. And so, the step from *paśu* to *vīra* must be achieved by breaking the *pāśa* or bonds and attachments that the animal man still has. Although the list of *tantra-śakta* fluctuates, according to common opinion the eight knots that have to be undone to pass from *paśu* to *vīra* are compassion, bewilderment, shame, family, morality, caste, tenderness, and fear. Now then, to enable freedom from these chains one should support oneself on the very links of this chain—hence the different practices of śāktism, stemming from the most refined to the most rough and ready. Yet if all has to be saved, it cannot in fact be said that there are realities that are impure or should be ignored.

Therefore it concerns not only total integration to enable saving whatever atom of being, but a regressive integration, that is to say, it doubles back along the travelled path by reversing the polarity of the whole cosmic process. The three elements of the *sādhana* are man, especially his corporality, the cosmos, and time. They should be sublimated, by reversing the process by which these three realities came into being.

The first element, the human body, tallies to the famous *pañca-makāra* or system of the five m's, because the five methods refer to five objects, which in Sanskrit begin with *m*. The *pañca-makāra-pūjā* consists in ritual use of these five objects in an inverse way to which they are generally used. If wine (*madyā*), meat (*māmsā*), fish (*matsya*), gestures (or grain, according

¹⁰² “*Sa eṣa neti nety ātma*” [The ātman is not that], BU IV.4.22. See also BU II.3.6; III.9.26. *Neti*, as we know, means *na iti* [not this]. The quoted texts are explicit as regards the incomprehensibility of the ātman.

¹⁰³ According to the *Kulārnava-tantra*, text from the eighteenth century in Nayak (2001), p. 113.

to another interpretation) (*mudrā*), or sexual union (*maithuna*) shackle man, it is through sublimation, and not fleeing from these five things, how man is able to overcome them and integrate them on his return to the Divinity. The second element refers to the total practice of yoga, above all *haṭha-yoga*, being the dominion of the body itself, the true image of the entire cosmos. It is a double process: on one hand, it tends to put the human body in harmony with the cosmos, by tuning it into the universe and as such making the image of the microcosmos the perfect reproduction of the macrocosmos, or, better yet, seeing both as identical, as in fact, there is no micro and macro cosmos. On the other hand, śaktism as a religion is not contented with only achieving a specific psychic serenity or psychological appeasement.¹⁰⁴ Once human beings have been *universalized*, "cosmified,"¹⁰⁵ they need to transcend the universe and join all opposites to all their opposites. One has to reach the final absorption and realization of oneness. It is here where the interpretation, somewhat eclectic as it is, of the triple *śakti* identified to the three *mārga*—*karma*, *bhakti*, and *jñāna*—encounters its deepest meaning.¹⁰⁶

The third element (time) primarily refers to the domination of the respiratory rhythm (*prāṇāyāma*) as the way to concentration (*dhāraṇa*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and ecstasy¹⁰⁷ (*samādhi*). The leap from time to eternity, in accordance with the announced principle, is not accomplished by evading time, or simply transcending it, but rather by beginning to make it go backward. This happens by stopping it, first retaining respiration, later ideas, and beyond that, the very course of the human cosmos and even the universe itself when it comes to the point of contact in which time is as if it were reabsorbed into eternity.¹⁰⁸

The principle of femininity finally constitutes the fifth dimension of śaktism, conferring a particular tinge and modality.

We have already mentioned that the *śakti* refers to the feminine aspect of the Divinity and from a certain angle to the universal divine mother principle. It is the *śakti* that has given birth to the world. The feminine principle forms part of the said polarity, yet śaktism constantly throws it into relief as being the most characteristic and, from the viewpoint of the cosmos, most immanent and direct part. Even where the bloodiest sacrifices are undertaken, female animals should not be sacrificed. Śakti as personified Divinity is the consort of her corresponding God, as we have already mentioned, but also she is mediator between the devotee and the Divinity. No believer will go to visit the image of their God, to obtain the *darsana* of the Divinity, without first paying a visit to the corresponding *śakti* as the propitiator and intercessor, as we have said when speaking of Viṣṇuism. The philosophical idea of the *śakti*, which we mentioned at the beginning, as intermediate bridge between the absolute and relative, at this point encounters its truest symbol. Hence that which is worshiped frequently takes the form of the female deity as being the most adequate to express our relationship with God. The eroticism of some practices and the feminine slant of the śaktic *bhakti* also find their explanation here. After this brief general description to what seem to us to be the most important principles in śaktism we ought to get down to the explanation of their practice, yet that would take us too far.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ The idea of *yoga* as simple psycho-physical hygiene should be very present for *yoga* devotees in the West.

¹⁰⁵ This expression comes from Eliade (1991a) in his book on the subject of *yoga*.

¹⁰⁶ The seven *acara* or classical behavior patterns of *kulaṅkava-tantra* are usually interpreted as such.

¹⁰⁷ See Eliade (1991a).

¹⁰⁸ The techniques for "stopping the world" described by Carlos Castaneda in his numerous works on the subject of Mexican shamanism, comes to mind. See in particular Castaneda (1978).

¹⁰⁹ As a bibliographical initiation one can consult, apart from the works already quoted, Chakravarti (1986) and S. B. Dasgupta (1969; 1974), which, even though touching a field into which we have

In summary, necessarily simplifying and trying to reveal its most profound dimension, the great strength of śāktism lies in the (re)discovery of the divine dimension of carnal love. All true love in man, if it is not reduced to an intellectual abstraction, is a love that also includes the body. Its danger lies in dehumanizing human love and making it degenerate into a mere technique toward attaining divine love, which is proven in the interpretation of human love that is reduced to a simple means or instrument to enable "realization"—generally for the male. And this is another shortcoming, in spite of some exceptions. Women may be reduced to mere objects, despite their idealization. The balance between the two loves, as in the harmony between the "spirit" and "matter," is not easy to accomplish. And here, yet again, the central role of experience (and not only in concept) of the *advaita* or *a-duality* arrives on the scene.

Tantrism as the Worship of Religion

What we said about the pretension of Tantrism, to form part of the *Veda* or to be a constitutive part of the *śruti*, does not mean it does not have its overtones of plausibility, if one considers that Tantrism does not claim to be anything else but the specific realization of the ritual path and sacrificial action of the *Veda*. Thus it can very well be considered as a special spirituality of a concrete and practical type, widespread throughout all Hinduism.

For this very same reason, although Tantrism might claim a special relationship with Śivaism, it is found present in all of the religious groups of Hinduism, without excluding, far from it, Buddhism and Jainism. Alongside the eighteen classical *Āgama* or *Śiva-tantra* we come across (although from a somewhat later period) the *yāmala* (*Rudra*, *Skanda*, *Brahma*, *Viṣṇu*, *Yama*, *Vāyu*, *Kubera*, and *Indra*).

To be able to delimit an almost undelimited field we shall restrict ourselves to explaining some of the Tantric categories that can be found in the most varied kinds of Hinduism, adding straightaway that these categories cannot be considered as being exclusive to Tantrism either.

Furthermore, Tantrism as the cult of religion does not claim to be linked to any theological system nor to any religion in particular. In fact, any practicing of the principles of any religion could very well be known as Tantrism. We are so used to identifying continents with contents and religions with their cultural vestments that it seems odd to us that, for instance, it can be said that which in Christianity is known as liturgy—that is, the actualization and self-application of salvation—in religions with an Indian origin is known as Tantrism. Tantrism, strictly speaking, does not claim to be anything else but "realization," which is the personal application of the method, namely the path to salvation. That perhaps later "*methodos*" might be converted into simple "*technē*" is a danger from which no religion is exempt. Magical ritualism and superstition are degrees of this degeneration, but true Tantrism, as in authentic liturgy, is very far from such exaggerations.

The general principle that governs Tantric worship appears to us to be the following: salvation is not an abstraction but rather an act (and, through being an act, very real) through which man reaches his plenitude, the "Absolute." Now then, in accordance with what we have said up until now, Tantrism does not wish to miss anything or leave something behind without being integrated. Salvific worship is not able to, as such, consist in only one sublimation of the salvific praxis done by the intellect, but rather it has to carry it out at all levels of the human being and at all levels of the cosmos. In other words, salvific action (and this, and not anything else, is what worship sets out to be, here as everywhere) would have to be a *realization* or integration

not ventured, contain important material and serve as a point of comparison and contrast; Glasenapp (1936), pp. 120–33; Gosh (1935); Pal (1910); Woodroffe (1963; 1974; 1978; 1991).

of the whole of our being to be able to reach the goal. Hence, Tantrism is nothing other than the process of materialization, embodiment if you will, or the realization of the cultic act. To save oneself, one has to carry out an act, one must realize something. Now, this something cannot be less than "all," that is, the salvation of the whole man and of the whole cosmos. A mere intellectual or willful act is not enough to save one, because it is not a question of saving the will or intellect, or even the soul, but rather the man in full and the entire cosmos. A well-known Tantric saying reads, "Only a God can give praise to a God." Hence there has to be a transfiguration of the worshiper's body before any kind of Tantric worship.¹¹⁰

Inner worship, the sacrifice of the mind, therefore should manifest itself and extend itself until the participation of the body and integration of time and space. Thus we are able to reduce the main Tantric categories, which in one way or another are encountered in all Hinduism and also in all other religions, to the following:

Salvation should be realized by the word apart from being done by the mind. The vocalization of worship is essential for it, if it intends to be complete. Word is the first Tantric category. Yet it does not concern a mere speculation on the essence of the *vac*, but rather the word actually pronounced, of the sound, of the physical and audible vocalized prayer, and on top of that, retransmitted and conferred by those with authority to do so. The *mantra* is the first Tantric category, although this would have existed long before its elaboration and use as far as Tantrism is concerned.¹¹¹ We already said that we are considering Tantrism as being something more than a simple particular religion.

Audition alone is not enough for worship to be complete. Visualization is also needed, the realization in space and its penetration into all that is accessible to us through our sense of sight. Man needs to see and, seeing, walk through space. If the *mantra* assimilates time, the *yantra* integrates space and all that is presented to human vision.

Localization, this is the *nyāsa*, represents the most particular and physical crystallization, so that man can never succumb to the temptation of abandoning matter or of being separated from the rest of humanity. Physical continuity belongs to the essence of all religion.

Finally we have the human body, which in its complexity also participates in the process of salvific reintegration. Thus, the *mudrā* also forms part of Tantric spirituality, along with other human gestures that not only express the state of the soul, but moreover, they belong to the very rhythmic regression of all things back to their origin. We have already mentioned dance as being a ritual act.

We shall describe these four characteristics very succinctly, as they afford an inside vision of Hinduism in all its complexity. We underline this, as too many times Hinduism has been identified with a simple speculative doctrine more or less disconnected from life, and has been interpreted as a kind of escapism from matter, a negation of time or disregard of spatial realities.

The Mantra

The very same etymology of the word will fully introduce us into the spirit and function of the *mantra*. Leaving aside secondary variations, or perhaps too elaborated

¹¹⁰ See Piano (1996a), p. 4:165.

¹¹¹ An important study, yet to be done, in spite of the numerous parallelisms described by specialists, would be that which relates Tantrism to shamanism. Thus, the name of Mircea Eliade comes to mind (see Eliade [2001a]). The reader also has within its reach the three volumes of his *Historia de las creencias y las ideas religiosas* (Eliade [1999]), although they do not deal with the subject specifically. An autobiographical description of a Russian anthropologist in the land (*taiga*) of the shamans in Siberia, Naumova (1999), contains implicit suggestions yet neither does it really concern our theme.

ones,¹¹² we can say that *mantra* means “instrument of the mind,”¹¹³ the means for the realization of sacred action, the natural companion of rite.¹¹⁴ “The *mantra* and the *brahmana* compose the *Vedas*,” states Brahmanic orthodoxy.¹¹⁵ Indeed, there is no *Veda* without personal assimilation and without the action that the *Veda* entails. The *Veda* is not just one book, as we have already said. Mantric recitation belongs to the *Veda* itself. A merely theoretical study of the *Veda* means nothing to Hinduism.¹¹⁶ There is a reason for the study to exist, yet it should always be integrated in the praxis and as a function of the whole.

The *mantra* consists in a sacred verse, or even in just one word, that may have an immediate significance or may be devoid of one, which is recited at first even aloud, later to be interiorized. The *mantra* is a sound with not only a supra-intellectual content but is primordially sacral, therefore salvific and consequently effective when it is recited in the right measure and due conditions. The *mantra* possesses a sacramental character.¹¹⁷

We shall leave aside the profound and elaborated speculative concept about the word (*vac*)¹¹⁸ and the spoken word (*śabda*)¹¹⁹ to try to express the ultimate content of the spirituality of the *mantra* without delving into other considerations.¹²⁰

The word *mantra* sometimes used to be translated “mystic sound”¹²¹ to express its dynamic salvific function. Indeed, the ritual repetition of the *mantra* has the effectiveness of identifying us with its object. This effectiveness seems to us to be triple: first, it serves as an exact point of psychological effectiveness for meditative concentration (*dhāraṇā*). For instance, any spirituality knows the effect of voiced prayer. Meditation concentrated on slow repetition—increasingly mellow, spiritual, and corporal all at the same time—is an undisputable procedure toward interiorization.¹²² Second, the *mantra* achieves intellectual identification of our spirit with the intelligible or spiritual content of the *mantra*. The religious truth that saves is not the simple enunciation of a doctrine but rather its personal assimilation of its also intellectual realization. Third, mantric worship allows a deeper and more total identification than the merely intellectual or intentional one.¹²³ The *mantra* is a

¹¹² “The phoneme *man* in *mantra* comes from the first syllable of *manana* (to think), and the phoneme *tra* in *trana* (liberation), from the servitude of *saṃsāra* (phenomenal world)” (Woodroffe [1955], p. 259).

¹¹³ The root word *man* means to think and is related with the Greek *menô* [remain and, originally, to think], the German *meinen*, the English *mind*, etc. See also the Latin words *meminisee*, *monere*, and the corresponding Greek words. The Monier-Williams dictionary translates it “instrument of thought, speech.”

¹¹⁴ See Levi (1898), p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ See TUI.9.

¹¹⁷ See the ten contributions in Alper (1989), with eighty-seven pages of useful bibliography (some fifteen hundred entries). See also Padoux (1975), who has written much particularly about this issue.

¹¹⁸ See esp. AB X.3.1 and the selection of Vedic texts in Panikkar (2001/XXV), pp. 119–52.

¹¹⁹ It is known that the foundation of the *AN* rests entirely on the value of the Vedic word.

¹²⁰ On the subject of *śabda* in Tantrism, see Woodroffe (2001). It seems to us as being important for the philosophy of modern Western language to try to open up to the issue of the language-sound in Tantrism. See Coward (1980); Gächter (1983); and G. S. Sastri (1980).

¹²¹ See Bagghi (1958), p. 4:211; Eliade (1991a); etc.

¹²² Hindû *yoga*, the nembutsu, *zen*, the Islamic *dhikr*, the Christian *hescasmo*, and even the rosary, etc., in spite of the fact that they should not be confused, undoubtedly present profound likenesses and emerge from the same human need and divine attraction.

¹²³ Take account that these three elements—“action,” “intention,” and “material support”—are

reality, a mystic manifestation and audible echo of the transcendent and, therefore, a stairway by which one has to clamber up toward its end. This is why we have made it clear that there are *mantra* that have no immediate intelligible meaning, so that this third function is not clouded over by the second.

To complete the exposition of the third function of the *mantra* we should integrate it within the collection of all the other rites, especially of the *nyāsa*, and present the important concept of *bija*.

The effectiveness of the *mantra* is not magic nor is it automatic. It may be said that the *mantra* is only a *mantra* when it is a *bija-mantra*—that is, when it has a *bija*, it has a living and divine seed that gives it effectiveness and value. The presence of this *bija* does not come about by mere outward repetition of the *mantra*. The divine seed needs to be fertilized, so to speak.¹²⁴ This is achieved by the *mantra* being imposed by the *gūrū*. No one can give a *mantra* to themselves. The *mantra* belongs to the initiation.¹²⁵

Each aspect of the Divinity or each divine personification has its own *bija*, and it is this that endows strength and effectiveness to the *mantra*. Moreover, it is this invisible soul of the *mantra* that allows identification with the Divinity to whom the *mantra* is conveniently recited.¹²⁶

It is precisely the vital presence of the *bija*, which is the divine seed in the *mantra*, that allows for the famous reductions of sacred texts of Hinduism (as in Buddhism—and even up to a certain extent in Christianity)¹²⁷ in such a way that thousands of *śloka* (verses) are brought down to just a few, and these in turn down to a single *mantra*, consisting of only one quite often monosyllabic sound.¹²⁸

Another important concept regarding the spirituality of the *mantra* is the *japa* or the ritual and rhythmic repetition, whether it be the name of God, *nāma-japa*, or a specific *mantra*, generally a *mantra-japa*.¹²⁹

The *japa* undertaken according to diverse methods of different schools has the immediate aim of introducing a not only intellectual but plenary presence of God, that is to say, which does not reduce it to the mere ultimate consciousness of our surrender with God, but rather to the penetration and compenetration of the divine being in all the actions of the *sādhaka*. It is Śiva himself who defines the *japa* as the very ordinary conversation of the *yogin*: “The conversation of the *yogin*, which is its recitation, its *kathā-yoga*.”

essential to the morphology of all sacraments.

¹²⁴ See an apothegm of the Desert Fathers: “In what does pure prayer consist? And the old sage answered: that which bears few words and many actions; because if your actions do not by far surpass your request, your prayers are no more than words, words empty of seeds” (Wallis-Budge [1907]).

¹²⁵ On the subject of the *mantra*, apart from works already mentioned, see Renou (1956); bibliography and texts in Eliade (1991a); Vishnu Devananda (1988).

¹²⁶ We do not believe we much betray Christianity or Hinduism by saying that *opus operatum* [the objective power] of the *mantra* concerns the *opus operantis* [the power of the transmittor (namely the personification of the Divinity)] of the *bija*, obviously different from the *opus operans* [the qualification of they who give it] of the *sādhaka* or of the *opus operantis* of those who receive it.

¹²⁷ See Mt 22:40.

¹²⁸ The most outstanding case is that of the mystical syllable *Aum*, which encloses all the *Veda* within it. See TUI.8; CU 11.23.3; MandU 1.8–12; etc.

¹²⁹ On the subject of the recitation of the name of God in Christianity, see Hausherr (1960), which will save us from further exposition. Two classical works from the Eastern Church can be consulted: *Philokalia* and *Tales of a Russian Pilgrim* (Anonymous); and the most recent *Invocation of the Name of Jesus* (Anonymous [1988]).

"All the words already freed from the soul, including the most ordinary ones, are *japa* because they are all impregnated of the uninterrupted realization of the Divinity of the *ātman*," comments Kṣemarāja.¹³⁰ Although *yoga* knows the *ajapa-mantra*—that is, the recitation without a formula that achieves at a given moment of the *ātmapraṇa-prīṣṭha* (breathing exercise, *prāṇāyāma*)—even in the most monistic mysticism of Hinduism the *japa*, which gradually goes on interiorizing, is not unknown.¹³¹

There are countless methods for practicing *japa*.¹³² When it comes down to it, it concerns repeating the *mantra* received, normally, in the initiation, such that the *bīja* or the divine strength of the latter penetrates our innerness and the human consciousness expands until reaching cosmic dimensions.¹³³ Along with *japa* one encounters the recitation of liturgical prayers (*stotra*) or repetition of the innumerable names of God.¹³⁴

According to Śivaism of Kashmir the effectiveness of the *mantra* lies in the fact that there will come a time in which it is not the particular individual who is reciting or uttering the formula, it is God himself within us.¹³⁵ Whatever word in which the ultimate I is the subject becomes a *mantra*, the *mantra-virya*, the *aham* (the I) that grants effectiveness and value to the outward manifestation of the *mantra*.¹³⁶ And so, it is not the sound disconnected from all its value.¹³⁷

The Yantra

The sonorous dimension of reality that is represented in the *mantra* has its spatial complement in the *yantra*. Human integration into the whole is not achieved only by means of vocal and mental prayer—that is, by means of meditative penetration into the reality, which is revealed to us in mantric worship, to be complete—it also requires the association of space, or even better, the penetration and compenetration of man with the most material dimension of reality, the spatial dimension. Man's salvation is not an escape, it is a returning; it is not a way out of the world, it is an authentic entry into it; it is not stripping oneself of matter, but rather it is unification and sublimation.

The *yantra* represents a forthright chart of the *mantra* and indirectly of all reality. It consists in a more or less complicated, and in each case precise form, which is made, whether on different objects, or perhaps on the actual floor, especially in front of houses or in temples. It is generally a geometric figure in which the circle, square, and triangle make up the main elements.

¹³⁰ Kṣemarāja, *Śivasūtravimarsinī* III.27.1.10 (in Silburn [1961]), p. 164. This is in the Śivaism of Kashmir.

¹³¹ See *Vijñāna Bhairava* 145 (in Silburn [1961], p. 163).

¹³² See the whole fourth part of the work by Gardet (1960), where the parallel phenomenon in Islam is studied and is compared to yoga and hesychasm. For an explanation from the viewpoint of Sufism, take a look at Nurbaksh (2001), pp. 41–59, and Schimmel (2002), pp. 184–95.

¹³³ See Rabbow (1954), where it is shown that the method of repetition was known and practiced also in Greek philosophical schools themselves. As Hausherr (1960) displays correctly (p. 170), the *meleté* of the fathers of Christianity, which is usually translated "meditation," comes closer to this inclusively verbal and voiced repetition so that the meditated "truth" penetrates our whole psyche, and not the mental reflection that is usually understood as being "meditation" these days.

¹³⁴ See the names of *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* in the *Mahābhārata*, XIII.149 and XII.284, respectively.

¹³⁵ See Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 3:5; Rom 8:26; etc.

¹³⁶ See the typical sonorous symbolism: The first and last letter of the alphabet in Sanskrit (A and HA) are unified in the M point to form *aham*, which means "I." See Silburn (1961), p. 164.

¹³⁷ See St. Augustine, *In Iohan.* tract. 102.n.1 (PL 35.1896), saying that "it is not the sound of the letters or syllables, but their meaning" that counts when one prays in the name of Christ.

"The *mantra* is effective, but the *yantra* is powerful," Tantrism usually states. Thus, in fact, they generally go together. The consecration of matter and, especially, the consecration of that reserved place for the apparition and action of the Divinity, the altar, direct relationship with all spirituality about the *yantra* joined to the *mantra*.¹³⁸

The *yantra*, in accordance with the direct meaning of the same term ("instrument," "handle," "machine"), has a double use: on one hand it claims to be the total representation of the cosmos from its divine beginning to its created manifestation; on the other hand it is the bridge upon which man visually enters within the real and authentic universe. On one hand it is objective; on the other it is the subjective instrument to be able to arrive at such objectivity. It is the visualization that is needed for man to delve into his true "self."

To worship God in a true fashion, and as such effectively as well, one has to, in one way or another, "homogenize" with him; in any other fashion there is no possible contact. We have already quoted a much repeated Tantric saying: that you cannot give praise to any Divinity if you are not divine yourself.¹³⁹ The *yantra* would allow this introduction into the divine world.

The most well known and studied kind of *yantra* in the West is known as *mandala*. It usually has a predominantly circular form in accordance with the word's actual meaning ("circle").¹⁴⁰

Apart from the nature of the characterization of the entire universe it also has the sense of protection and is intimately bonded to the issue of initiation.¹⁴¹

We cannot dwell upon this important subject here, a subject that has been well employed as a demonstration of the theory of collective unconsciousness in C. G. Jung's depth psychology.¹⁴²

The Nyāsa

This other element in Tantrism consists in the ritual projection of the Divinity or of its grace toward man, in a concrete fashion, as a channel toward real impregnation, through physical contact. At bottom, it concerns the most possible specific localization within the general lines of Tantrism. That is, the fact of good intention is not enough, not even with very deep and spiritual meditation, as there is the risk of leaving to one side the needed human corporality and physical continuity for integral salvation.

We already said that the whole of the human body is *yantra-tattva* in Tantrism. The *nyāsa* simply puts it into practice, that is to say, projecting the grace of the Divinity by virtue of the physical contact between the priest or initiator and the people or the initiate, so that the divine transformation is complete.

The rites are many and varied, ranging from those that entail a deep meaning to those that evince uncontrolled degeneration. Perhaps the most common would be the one known as *śaṅga nyāsa*, or in other words the localization or projection of the "Divinity" in the six members of the body by means of contact with fingers, namely, the heart, head, the tip of the skull, the thorax, the three eyes, and the hand.

What is interesting for our purpose is the recognition of physical and corporal contact to enable the retransmission of "grace."

¹³⁸ On the important issue of the altar, see Galling (1925). Mus (1935) continues to be a monumental but also fundamental work. See also Heesterman (1957) and Kramrisch (1996), apart from the works by Eliade already mentioned.

¹³⁹ "Nadevo devam arcayet."

¹⁴⁰ On the subject of the mandala, apart from other references, see Jung (2002a); Tucci (1978); the bibliography in Eliade (1991a); and also Gómez de Llaño (1998).

¹⁴¹ See *KathU* I.3.10–11; II.7–10.

¹⁴² See esp. Jung (1944; 2002a; 2002b), etc.

The *nyāsa* not only can be done on the human body, but also it could and should be carried out, for instance, in the exaltation-blessing of a sacred image.¹⁴³

The Mudrā

The *mudrā*, or liturgical gestures of Tantrism, constitute the culmination, so to speak, of Tantric realization insofar as it can be considered as the representation, materialization, or, indeed we might add, the embodiment of the state of salvation or the path that leads to it.

A *mudrā* is a gesture both of the body, and more especially of the hand, with two aspects. On the one hand it is the preparation for the liturgical ceremony and represents the more or less necessary condition for the act to be effective. The *mudrā* in this sense belongs to the ritual and prepares the body and the spirit for their purification. The well-known *āsana* of yoga are *mudrā* involving the whole body. On the other hand the *mudrā* is the result or crystallization of purification, the outer representation of an inner state, the corporal and visible facet of invisible spiritual reality.

There are the most varied kinds of *mudrā*, from hand gestures to yogic postures and actions (*kriyā*).

Dance has popularized the different *mudrā* of the hand, even though dance as a whole is a *mudrā*; the *kathākali*, the famous dance of Malabar, knows at least 504 different *mudrā*.¹⁴⁴ This would be the time to speak of dance in Hinduism as being not far short of perfect in the double sense previously mentioned.¹⁴⁵ It is common knowledge that dance along with sacrifice is the act of worship par excellence.¹⁴⁶

The *mudrā* represents, as far as the body is concerned, the participation in the work of salvation. For instance, the posture of our body or its member's gestures when we pray is not a matter of indifference. The influence is reciprocal. The *mudrā* is a support and an expression all at the same time.

Epilogue

We mentioned at the beginning that this study did not intend to be thematically complete. For instance we have left out the spirituality of *yoga*, and we have to say the same for the popular spirituality of festivals, temples, pilgrimages, and so on.

We have also omitted a speculative part that concerns the great spiritual problems of mysticism, prayer, and worship according to Hinduism, to be able to obtain a synthetic vision of its *dharma*—a gap that the author particularly laments, since it would have been useful to undo the misunderstanding of historical proportions due to the projection of modern Western concepts on all the different philosophies of India, forgetting they are not Western schools of spirituality. Philosophy in India is *sādhana*, or speculative praxis to

¹⁴³ See esp. Ravi Varma (1958), p. 4:451.

¹⁴⁴ See the drawings and photographs in the monographic number dedicated to the *kathākali* by Marg. Bombay, XI.1 (XII/1957), pp. 16ff.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Coomaraswamy (1996). The work presented by R. Rolland contains fourteen essays, one of which (being among the shortest) provides the title for the whole book; P. Banerji (1956); Bowers (1967); Cuisinier (1951); De Zoete (1953; 1957); Frédéric (1957); Iyer (1955); VV. AA. (1963).

¹⁴⁶ These days the bibliography on dance from this religious point of view is vast. Apart from the reference in the previous footnote it is worth taking a look at some with particular reference to India: Backman (1977); Oesterley (1970); Rahner (1990); Sachs (1933); Torniai (1951); Leeuw (1930).

enable reaching realization.¹⁴⁷ We have mentioned, but we have not enlarged upon, the fact that philosophy is salvific. The analytic capacity of the West, especially in modern times, has succeeded in splitting philosophy from theology, and even the latter from religion.¹⁴⁸ Such distinctions are useful, yet dichotomies that separate may prove to be fatal. The same thing can be said about the divorce between spirituality and religion, as the one as noted between theory and praxis.

What has been said up until now nonetheless acts as an introduction to the religious thought of India and we also hope to the religious life of the reader.

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The mesocosmos is man according to Hinduism (unlike the Hellenic microcosmos), this intermediate world between the fleeting and the perennial, the temporal and the eternal, the created and the divine, which has a double life at its core: one throughout the burdensome pilgrimage of time, another in optimistic, serene temporality.¹⁴⁹ Historical Christianity insists upon the first to obtain the second.¹⁵⁰ Hinduism underlines the second to overcome the first. Both moments are present in both religions, but whereas Western (especially modern) Christianity has insisted upon the first path, traditional (especially ancient) Hinduism is impassioned by the second. The "sacred secularity" often mentioned as the great challenge of the third millennium to most religions consists precisely in connecting these two lives in *advaita* harmony. The "other" life is already present in this one.¹⁵¹

If we expurgate Christian terminology of its sectarian interpretations, to contribute to mutual comprehension we could say the following, in Christian terms:

One of the great institutions in Hinduism is the Easter mystery, that is, the experience that the world has been overcome, that real Life is here (that the Christ Pantocrator has resurrected), and therefore we are freed from the captivity of time and the slavery of space. Victory over the world we are in, whose form and shape are transitory, becomes a reality, because eternity has an impact upon time, and frees us with true freedom—freedom that is not creatural in *enabling* us to do something, but rather freedom from creaturability itself, so that the divine emerges in that which is human in perfect communion. The end of man is not in the future but rather in the present and in deepening into the present (perforating it) as if to reach the tempter's nucleus of the human being. Perfection is not acquired through accumulation but rather through simplification; true science is not overcome by knowing a great amount of things but rather by forgetting them; happiness does not lie in possession but rather in being possessed, not in loving but in being loved. The *jīvamukta* (the resurrected one) is already upon this Earth.

¹⁴⁷ See the symposium "Philosophy and Sadhana," organized for the twenty-second session of the Indian Philosophical Congress (Patna, 1949) and later published in N. V. Banerjee (1949), pp. 1–22, with contributions of J. M. Chubb and S. V. Dandekar, to which we could add G. R. Malkani's presidential speech on the subject of "Philosophical Truth" (pp. 2:1–31).

¹⁴⁸ See Panikkar (1997/XXXIX), pp. 25ff.

¹⁴⁹ St. Augustine's citation also speaks of "two paths . . . , one of them unfolding into faith, the other in vision; one throughout the progress of time of our pilgrimage, the other in the eternal dwelling; one in the feeling of fatigue, the other in rest; one on the path, the other at home; one in the effort of activity, the other in the reward of contemplation" (Tract 124 in *In Iohan. (Brev. Rom die 27/XII)*).

¹⁵⁰ The Neoplatonism of the Renaissance, through Christian influence, also places man at the center of the cosmos. See, for instance, the speech about the Dignity of Man by Pico della Mirandola and man as "nodus et copula mundi" in M. Ficino.

¹⁵¹ See Panikkar (2000/XLIII).

Hindū spirituality is not so much centered on the restlessness of our heart¹⁵² or the search for God¹⁵³ but rather on its attainment. It does not so much concern reaching him but rather revealing him. Life is lived not so much a pilgrimage, more an expectation—and in the last instance, hope.

The ultimate foundation of Hindū spirituality consists in the first place of the total and complete repose of the Self, as such leaving aside as secondary one's whole collection of volitions and thoughts.¹⁵⁴ But in the second place, Hindū spirituality does not rest there but goes still further: once the Self has been abandoned, it abandons its very Being as in no other way can absolute union be realized.¹⁵⁵

In contradistinction to the spirituality of *participation* to which Christian theology has been inclined—originally so by the Greeks, putting this before communion¹⁵⁶—Hindū mentality has cultivated a spirituality of *manifestation*. Participation (*metexis*) is counterpoised by manifestation (epiphany); imitation (*mimesis*), by realization. The theophanic character of man, and all created beings, can also be considered as a divine reflection. Not as a "part," that is, but as a "reflection." Hence, all Divinity is reflected in each and every portion of being. It is this speculative character of the universe that makes it possible, for instance, for the *mandala* to become a cosmogram that represents the whole universe and with its integration within us makes us what we are: a reflection of the whole, the very whole reflected, the same and differently in each one of us—meaning that the Divinity is not a Supreme individual separated from all the rest of us, as should remain clear.

Perhaps by summarizing some of the characteristics of Hindū *dharma* we might be able to arrive, for example, at the following:

A nonconceptual spirituality—one that has to use concepts but is scarcely contented by them, considering them to be very rough, not to say misleading translations. The advantages and dangers of such an approach are obvious. The official West, which tolerates artists and which has managed to reduce philosophy to the algebra of concepts, has forgotten symbolic knowledge, the key to understanding Hindū spirituality—and, ultimately, ourselves.

This first characteristic is conditioned by the second: its *experiential* dimension that can lead to its seeking to be experimental. What really matters is not the concept, with all that it entails, but rather personal experience. That is, what is important is what is actually lived by a particular person and assimilated into their personal and nontransferable experience. Here also the limits and the strength of such an approach are plain. The split between ontology and epistemology (between the Self reflected in knowledge and the study of this knowledge independently from the Self) is one of the causes of the misunderstanding between East and West—while not meaning that these disciplines should be confused.

A third aspect, and here once again we make this explicit, would be its claim to *integrality*. Hindū spirituality intends to apprehend the man in full, his head, his heart,

¹⁵² See the famous "Fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te" [for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.], St. Augustine, *Conf.* I.1.

¹⁵³ See the no less important "Si revera Deum quærit" [if you truthfully search for God] from the rule of St. Benedict.

¹⁵⁴ We are also thinking of Meister Eckhart when he speaks of renouncing God for God (*Sermon Qui audit me . . .*).

¹⁵⁵ See the Syrian Fathers in one of their major exponents: "who thinks that God is, does not inquire either for the when or the how" (Philoxenes of Mabbug [in Hausherr (1960)], p. 105). "Shame on those who search," exclaims St. James of Sarug (*ibid.*)

¹⁵⁶ See 2 Pet 1:4.

and his action—as, in the final analysis, is any spirituality worth speaking of. When it comes down to it, this would explain the echo that Hindūtvā ideology has found as a reaction to modern dichotomies—although this does not excuse the remedy being worse than the illness.

Finally, its *absolute*, not to say on occasions absolutist, facet also becomes obvious. That is, it does not allow compromise and is consequent right to the end. It does not waver before any obstacle nor is it contented by answers that are not total or absolutely definite. Here also the danger of transcending all, including the truth and reality themselves, is evident, even though any stopping halfway along the path would be even worse.

It is obvious that a phenomenological description of Hindū *dharma* cannot be given for the very fact of its variety. Any characterization, as negative, passive, scatalogic, and so forth, would not capture Hindū spirituality but only a tendency within it. Each culture is a world on its own, and the spirituality or rather spiritualities of India cannot be sundered from their cultural world. Hence, making comparisons is dangerous. On the other hand they are inevitable, as we can only understand something if we refer it to our parameters of intelligibility, which are conditioned by our respective cultures. And so it is not a question here of imitating, since what is good in one ambience does not have to be in another. It concerns, rather, allowing oneself to be impregnated by those seeds that find fertile ground in one's own culture. This cultivation is indispensable above all in those cultures that have lain fallow for too long a time.¹⁵⁷

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Let us allow ourselves to make a brief commentary on the famous first verse of *Īśa-Upaniṣad*:

*Īśavasyam idaṃ sarvaṃ
yat kiṃ ca jagatyam jagat
tena tyaktena bhūñjītha
ma gṛdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam.*

All this, all that moves in this mutable world, is inhabited by the Lord; find therefore your joy in detachment, do not crave the wealth of anyone.

God is the first and only reality. He is the principle within all things and the guardian watching attentively over everything that exists.¹⁵⁸

Besides Him there is a shifting and mundane world, the appearance of things and the very base upon which they rest—the latter being the other pole of the tension that constitutes the whole of the temporal process of the universe.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ See Panikkar (2003/XLVII).

¹⁵⁸ *Īśa* means God, the Master, the controller; the Lord comes from the same root word *is*, to be master. *Īśa* also connotes the idea of possession and dominance. He is to whom the world and the things within it belong to (in German “eigen,” “Eigentum,” from the Gothic root “aigan,” to get, to have. God not only simply is, but also regarding the world He also “has” and “gets”)—hence the meaning powerful, capable (facility, power, dominance). The most common translation is Lord, although Divinity, God, Supreme spirit, and also “Self” have been employed.

¹⁵⁹ *Jagatyam jagat*. An untranslatable play on words: “in the world world.” What there is in the world of world. Yet world, *jaggat*, is the reduplicative of *gam* (cf. Pāṇini, III.2.178). To go (Gehen, Gang), and it means change, movement, mutability. The world is that which moves; which changes, goes; which walks the path. Thus, *jagat* also means “world” in the sense of people: all that which swarms

The intimate and constitutive relationship between these two poles is divine inhabitation. God pervades it and penetrates all. God is everywhere and makes up the ultimate basis, the final support for everything. They are not two things, since there is no predicate that can tell me what kind of thing they are. The world is God's temple, it is the divine medium, it is like the external cladding that God has taken on, it is like penetrating perfume that envelops everything.¹⁶⁰ The relationship is one of transcendence and immanence both at the same time. One requires the other. God and "all this" are not two things, yet neither are they one. Nor is there a predicate here capable of making either or both comprehensible. The world is not God and God is not the world, yet, nevertheless, they are neither one nor two; even less could it be said that they were two "aspects" of a same reality, as even if in a certain fashion the world could be characterized as a manifestation of the Divinity, God is not an aspect of himself or of a Divinity above him.¹⁶¹ The fear of pantheism in the West, especially the monotheistic West, has led it to insist so much upon divine transcendence that it has converted it into a superfluous hypothesis with regard to the world: it may be found at the beginning (the "*chiquenaude*" of Descartes)¹⁶² or at the end (Teilhard of Chardin) as α or ω ; but not in the whole alphabet.¹⁶³ The divine intervention throughout the entire universe, while providing the starting point for Scholastics, has practically been relegated to an abstruse *theologoumenon*.¹⁶⁴

The spirituality reflected in this text, one among hundreds, without denying the transcendence of the "Lord," underlines his immanence. God is in all.

Because of this, the "path," realization, salvation, consists in dispossession, in "renunciation," in rising above all obstacles, in shedding old skin, such that a-ppearance dis-appears. Non-attachment is, consequently, not only the necessary condition for any spiritual life but, in fact, it is also sufficient, as when we become detached from what we are not, we are simply left with the appearance of what we are in reality. Moreover, the renunciation

everywhere. Other translations: "that which moves within the moving," "alles was auf Erden lebt," "bewegt," "se meut," "moving world," "whatever changing there is in this changing (world)," "ogni cosa è un universo che si muove nell," "universale movimiento," etc.

¹⁶⁰ The rich root *vas* is probably quintuple, and it is definitely triple. On one hand, it means to be resplendent, to shine (God shines and illuminates all). Then there is a root with the meaning of to dress, to coat, to cover, to wear (God is covered and dresses with the mantle of his creation). Third (and which could be the most appropriate root for our text), it means to inhabit, to reside (in German, "ge-wesen," "war," and in English "was" and "were" with the meaning of the Spanish "ser" (God inhabits the world as if it were his temple). The fourth and fifth meanings relate to "loving," "aspiring," and "separating." Sanskrit allows for major philological meanderings. Other translations: "covered," "enveloped," "encompassed," "controlled and owned," "to be hidden," "persuaded," "in the glory of [God]," "[God has caused] it to be," "revêtu," "[in Gott] versenken," "umhüllt," "habitado," "cubierto," "tutto ciò che esiste é una veste," etc.

¹⁶¹ *Isavasyam* shows this peculiar relationship between God and his world. *Idam sarvam*: "all this," all which is seen, that which can be pointed at, all that which is, in the most immediate and existential sense, is *isavasyam*, penetrated and perfumed by God, inscribed and enveloped within him, lined with him. The reality of "all this" is his being *isavasyam*.

¹⁶² The initial impulse (*chiquenaude*) that sets the world into motion, to which, according to Pascal, God's role is reduced in the philosophy of Descartes.

¹⁶³ One of the symbols of the divine in popular piety of Hinduism is the letter *a* because it is found present with all consonants (which are pronounced *ka, ga, na, ja, da, pa, sa, ha*, etc.).

¹⁶⁴ In the 1940s I introduced the notion of theophysics not as physics of God but the study of the material world as a manifestation of God himself. See Panikkar (1961/5).

of being is not ontically possible nor can it be thought about ontologically. Annihilation is as far beyond our power as creation, strictly speaking. Consequently, detachment is not a negative virtue nor just a prior one; it is the maximum abandon to the Self that penetrates and envelops us. Therefore (*tena*), as a consequence of this truth, as the only position congruent with the reality of things and not a frenetic act of your will or because of your unbridled desire for salvation, make up your mind to get in tune with this world penetrated by God. As an example of this spirit, let us look at the popular song transcribed by Rabindranath Tagore¹⁶⁵ as

O, cruel man of urgent needs, must you scorch with fire the mind which still is a bud?
Do you want to burst it into bits and destroy its perfume in your impatience?
Do you not see that my Lord, the Supreme Teacher, takes ages to perfect the flower
and is never in a fury of haste?
But because of your terrible greed, you only rely on force, and what hope is there
for you O man of urgent need?
“Priti!,” says Madan the poet, “hurt not the mind of my teacher.”
Know that only he who follows the simple current, and loses himself can hear the
voice, O man of urgent need.

And this approach is that of finding your joy in renunciation, that of enjoying total detachment and as such sustaining yourself.¹⁶⁶ It concerns a positive and active approach of enjoying yourself in the truth, of resting in reality, of satiating with renunciation.¹⁶⁷ This renunciation is not the negation of something positive but rather the abandonment of that which is not, to cast away obstacles that prevent God’s total penetration of one.¹⁶⁸

Finally, as proof, and also as a consequence, you do not crave anyone else’s wealth, you have no ambition in the mere horizontal development of your existence, you do not harbor this yearning to possess what does not belong to you; so be free.¹⁶⁹

The eighteen verses of this short Upaniṣad might present us with a nearly complete treatise of the most outstanding points of Hindū spirituality, but only the first verse gives

¹⁶⁵ In his presidential message to the first section of the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1925.

¹⁶⁶ Some translate *bhunjitha* as “support,” “hold,” and so, because of lack of assistance, one holds oneself.

¹⁶⁷ The root *bhuj* means “enjoy,” “enjoy oneself”—hence, eat, drink, and possess also. Thus it concerns underlining the paradox of the enjoyment of nonattachment, the possession of being denuded, the satiation of detachment.

¹⁶⁸ *Tyaktena*—that is, renunciation “by means of abandonment.” *Tyaj* means “abandon,” “leave” (a place, an idea, any given thing). “Find your enjoyment in renunciation,” “protect your self through that detachment,” “thou mayest be pleased with whatever thou mayest receive,” “through such renunciation do thou save (Myself),” “Erfreue dich, indem du dieses (Vergängliche) loss lässt,” “wer ihm engsagt genießt wahrhaft,” “contente-toi de ce qu’il t’abandonne,” “en lo que él deja ir te regocijas,” “disfruta con lo renunciado,” “goza con la renuncia,” “di tutto ciò fruisci, essendotene distaccato,” etc.

¹⁶⁹ *Ma grāhah*—no ambition, desire. The root *grāh* really means to be ambitious (in German, “gier,” and in English, “greedy”). “Covetest thou not anyone’s riches,” “covet not the goods of anyone at all,” “wealth,” “set not your heart on another’s possession,” “ne covoitte le bien de personne,” “ne jalouse le bien de qui que se soit d’autre,” “no ambiciones ningún bien,” “no deseas los bienes de nadie,” “no ansies el don de nadie mas,” “nach freudem gute giere nicht,” “strebe nicht nach eines anderen Besitz.” We have left out other practically identical translations and clarifying digressions.

us a clear example.¹⁷⁰ We have referred to some examples in European languages, as a range of possible interpretations.

These are the last verses of this Upaniṣad (which are usually recited as preparation for reaching death and which are prayers to obtain remission of sins and the vision of God):

The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden disk; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.

O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the Luster which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Puruṣha there and there, He am I.

The Breath of things is an immortal Life, but of this body ashes are the end. AUM! O Mind, remember, that which was done remember! O Mind, remember, that which was done remember.

O God Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose.¹⁷¹

In present-day India perhaps the most quoted text in all the Upaniṣads and perhaps all the Sanskrit tradition of Hinduism is that well-known liturgical oration,

*Asato mā sad gamaya,
tamaso mā jyotir gamaya,
mrtyor mā mṛtam gamaya.*

Make me go from the irreal to Reality,
make me go from darkness to light,
make me go from death to Immortality.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ It is interesting to know what Gandhi said in Kottayam in 1937 (published in Harijan in the same year):

Since God pervades everything, nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed unchallengeable Master of everything you possess. If it is universal brotherhood—not only brotherhood of all human beings, but of all living things—I find it in this mantra. If it is unshakable faith in the Lord and Master—and all the adjectives you can think of—I find it in this mantra. Since he pervades every fiber of my being and of all of you, I derive from it the doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth and it should satisfy the cravings of all philosophical communists. This mantra tells me that I cannot hold as mine anything that belongs to God and that, if my life and that of all who believe in this mantra has to be a life of perfect dedication, I cannot consider as being mine anything that belongs to God and that . . . my life . . . has to be in total service to all his creatures, my brothers and sisters. (In Radhakrishnan [1953b]).

¹⁷¹ *IsU* 15–18.

¹⁷² *BU* I.3.28.

SECTION II

ASPECTS AND FOUNDATION OF HINDUISM

ON THE HERMENEUTICS OF TRADITION IN HINDUISM¹

*"You diligently study the Scriptures.
These are the Scriptures that testify about me."*

—*Jn 5:39 NIV*

Introduction

In the present study, only a few aspects of a broad theme, so meaningful for our situation, will come into focus and be considered, but this narrow focus should contribute to a different perspective from which to illuminate problems in the Western tradition of hermeneutics.

The Contemporary Problem in the West

Why does tradition need hermeneutics? A serious investigation of this question must lead to the conclusion that there is no hermeneutics without transmission, because the entirety of hermeneutics is precisely the hermeneutics of something given, something transmitted—in short, of a tradition.

A further question imposes itself here: Is there transmission without hermeneutics?

In our time, this question has been negatively answered since every transmission essentially comes to us together with its own hermeneutics. This assumption certainly may hold a kernel of truth, because, to pass *something* along to people, it is necessary for this passing to take place in a human way, that is, a human *passing* to a human *receiver* and with a certain human interpretation in this passing, in this transmission. Now, this *human interpretation* presupposes a certain consciousness in the execution of giving, and as such, it already implies a certain hermeneutics.

In this context, the traditional distinction between an active and a passive transmission would appear important to remember, whereby an active tradition concerns the execution of transmission, but passive transmission concerns the content of something transmitted. Active transmission pertains to reception, acceptance ("kabala" also means much the same as receiving, accepting), but passive hermeneutics (the subject of our investigation) pertains to interpretation, *insight* into what is transferred to us.

To answer the question on the possibility of transmission without hermeneutics, one must know whether passing along "a wrapped package" is possible without knowing its

¹ Original book: Sur l'herméneutique de la tradition dans l'Hindouisme. Pour un dialogue avec le Christianisme, in E. Castelli (ed.), *Ermeneutica e tradizione* (Rome: Archivio di Filosofia, 1963), 343–70; then included in *Kerygma und Indien. Zur heilsgeschichtlichen Problematik der christlichen Begegnung mit Indien* (Hamburg: Reich, 1967), chap. 3 (translated from German by Horace Jeffery Hodges).

contents, without opening it, without damaging the enclosed space of tradition, the seclusion of Being, through our knowledge; or whether one must open the wrapped package, even if the aroma then escapes or the bird flies away. Who knows if the knowledge is always knowledge of good and evil? Can one really receive the transmission—the package—without opening it, without checking its contents? Is there a pure tradition whose contents will never be revealed? Can one pass along the holy fire without knowing its burning power or beholding its flame? Let us put the question in Christian terms: for the church, the sacraments, and the gospel, is the gift of a passive hermeneutics, an interpretation, needed in order to be the church, to be effective as sacraments, and to be appealing as gospel?

The problem is difficult. If we answer no, that interpretation is not needed, we will inevitably end up in the realm of magic, of superstition, of obscurantism, of primitivism. (One participates in choral singing without understanding it; one performs the ritual without knowing its inner meaning; one continues doing what one has always done without accounting for it; one preserves the inheritance without increasing it. . . .) If one answers yes, that interpretation is needed, then one runs the risk of naturalism (the aroma escaping the package!); or there is the risk of rationalism (the form of reason that works violence on life), or one even loses faith completely.

Might there not even be the possibility that the proliferation of rationality and the disappearance of a sense for mystery could be caused by the hegemony of hermeneutics within transmission? If one must know and understand everything in order to pass it along, if one must know everything to act, then there is no trust, no belief, and perhaps even no more action either. Nothing would be mediated, nothing passed along. A certain capacity for notification perhaps remains; the dynamism, however, is lost. Or so the contemporary problem appears from the perspective of Western culture.

The Indic Answer

Let us begin in medias res (in the middle of things): why can the *Vedas* not be translated, if not that the independence, indeed the hegemony of tradition, should be maintained against hermeneutics? Why is the translated Qur'an no longer the Qur'an? Why, according to recent decrees² of the Roman Church, cannot the laypeople who lead the congregation's prayer translate literally the Latin formulae uttered by the priest who is celebrating the Mass? In all these cases, there is the belief that something needs to be preserved here, even something independent, deep in the tradition, that cannot be exhaustively explained merely by hermeneutics.

The existential cry that we hear everywhere in the Western or modern world, and that is ready to expand into the East, offers an example of that. Isn't this perhaps connected to a new awareness gripping all of humanity today? In this "modern" world, the same question is asked everywhere: Does life have meaning? And then the long since classic question: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" A question that comes from the same source as the current problem of our culture: Does God really exist?

It seems now proper for us to deal with the question more in detail. The answer of the Indic world, which has remained true to tradition, reads as follows: If life has a meaning, then the meaning is there even if I do not know it, also without my hermeneutics. If Being *is* (and that is not just a catchword), then it really is. I am not the guardian of Being; rather, Being is my shepherd. Man is "lord" neither over Being nor over himself; the Lord is his

² Second Vatican Council.

shepherd. A human being is neither guardian nor cultivator of Being. My question about God's existence is unimportant and has no meaning for His existence or nonexistence. The problem *in itself* has nothing to do with the problem that concerns *me*.

We want to describe, in few words and with a handful of examples, the trust that India puts in reality, its deeply religious attitude of quietness about the Primal Ground, without wishing to base everything on Man. These characteristics of Indic tradition are by no means indications either of primitiveness or of a precritical intellectual attitude. A large part of Indic speculation is nothing other than an attempt to find a certain hermeneutics for this problem in order to preserve the ultimate validity of the "given," the primacy of Reality. Speculation about hermeneutics forms a great part of the entire Indic philosophy. One can well add that there are not many cultures that have brought forth such a highly developed hermeneutics simply to prevent the transmission of tradition from being completely overgrown with hermeneutics. The answer of traditional India to the question asked at the beginning is therefore clear: there is no hermeneutics without tradition, but there is certainly transmission of tradition without hermeneutics, and this is the true transmission.

The Hermeneutics of Tradition in Hinduism

We are now at the core of our observations. The main part of our demonstration should bring together a few considerations for an open and indispensable dialogue with Christianity. For this reason, the message of this chapter also possesses a double meaning: for even though our investigation remains faithful to the letter as well as to the spirit of Hinduism, it is still inspired by the necessity for this dialogue to prove fruitful for the one as well as for the other of these two great religious traditions of human history.

From our inquiry arise two great problematic areas: the first is *dīkṣā*, that is, initiation, and the second is *mīmāṃsā*, that is, hermeneutics in the strict sense of the word.

Dīkṣā or Initiation

India has brought forth an entire philosophical-theological jungle in its efforts at investigating the problem of initiation, that is, the problem of active transmission of tradition received by an active hermeneutics, or in other words, the fact of passing along the wrapped package and accepting this closed package without opening it. This attempt to preserve the primacy of Being before consciousness, and the primacy of implementation and action before thinking, is characteristic of every religious attitude, even if the very primacy—in the end—requires clarification through human reflection. Every religion aims to bring a message of salvation, or better said, to convey salvation to actual people. Before dealing theoretically with the message of salvation, religion first deals with salvation itself, and thus with the manner in which salvation is transferred.

The transference that the initiation tries to realize is thus, first of all, not the "transmission" of some teaching, a book, or any content, but the transmission of *what is there*, of a reality. It has nothing to do with the simple transfer of a message of salvation, as one might pass along a greeting or good wishes, but is rather a matter of allowing the arrival of salvation itself, indeed of Him, the one who brings salvation. In its original state, a religion is an *orthopraxis* (into which orthodoxy is fitted) for it does not limit itself to announcing a teaching but, above all, brings salvation to Man. For this reason, any religious transmission demands a change of state, a rebirth. There is no way to reach the kingdom of God, to grasp His message in the depth of its existential meaning, or to attain this salvation without rebirth, without initiation,

without baptism, without personal involvement, without participating in rites . . . honorable concepts, each of which would require monographic treatment.

In terms of hermeneutic concepts, hermeneutics here would mean faithful loyalty with regard to the tradition, *fidelitas* (and *fidelitas* has its origin in *fides*, that is, faith), but not understanding, consciousness, interpretation of transmission. Certainly, there can be knowledge here also, but the pure concept of this knowledge will probably be clear only if we take the French translation *connaissance* and show its constituent parts: “co-naissance,” which implies something like “being born with” in the sense of “being born anew.” This new birth is the initiation. As an aside, allow me simply to mention that the word “hermeneutics” in Greek means something like stating or expressing, on the one hand, and explaining or interpreting, on the other hand. We find a third meaning, finally, in the word “translating.”

There is a passage in the *Symposium* where Plato speaks of the *daimon* as an interpreter of Man to Gods, and of Gods to Man (ερμηνευον θεοις τα παρα ανθρωπων και ανθρωποις τα παρα θεων),³ as a mediator, an intermediary between Gods and humans as well as between humans and Gods. As for the *daimon*, it does not indicate simply one who translates the divine message to humans, but also one who carries the human response to the call of the Gods, that is, an ontological interpreter as the place of mediation between heaven and earth.

Naturally, tradition requires transference, and this is essentially the case. Even St. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of a first tradition (πρωτη παραδοσις) that we receive in the baptism,⁴ and by which is not meant a message, but what one receives through the baptism: the grace of the Lord, the Lord himself.

Maybe this free gift of grace offered to us has been intellectualized a little too much over the centuries. And I wonder if the Hindū theology of initiation might not be helpful for modern Christian intellectuals in interpreting εν αρχη ην ο λογος not in the sense of εν αρχη ην το κηρυγμα (thus: “In the beginning was the Word,” not in the sense of “In the beginning was the Message”), as has so often been tried.⁵ One should not too hastily make *logos* equivalent to *kérygma*, as we will see later.

We do not, however, intend to develop the entire Hindū theology of initiation here: it would be too much *pro domo mea* (in defense of my private views) and would too strongly emphasize the classical direction of Hinduism, and that other existential aspect of an active transmission that is welcomed by an active receiver, who thinks that precisely this conveys faithfulness and salvation.

Mīmāṃsā, Hermeneutics

In Hinduism, the hermeneutic system in a strict sense is called *mīmāṃsā*. It presents the incredible and probably unique attempt to accomplish an Absolute Hermeneutics. In many cultural realms, an Absolute Philosophy has been sought, and in principle, every type of idealism pursues this goal. But one very seldom encounters such a keen and thoroughgoing attempt to construct an all-encompassing philosophy presenting itself as a pure hermeneutics, as hermeneutics per se.

³ Plato, *Sympos.* 202c.

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Epist.* 34 (PG 46.1088D).

⁵ The expression stems from Bishop Dibelius, cited by Y. Congar, *La tradition et les traditions* (Paris: Fayard, 1960), 21. We use this occasion for recommending this work, which is rich in classical and modern material.

Indic Hermeneutics

From a traditional point of view, one speaks of six orthodox (or classic) philosophical systems in India, and six heterodox ones.⁶ Here, strictly speaking, are found a number of hermeneutic systems for interpreting not only the *Vedas* and all other holy traditions, but also the reality outside all such traditions. For this reason, one kind is called *āstika*, that is, affirmative systems, and the other *nāstika*, that is, systems that deny any authority (of the *Vedas*). The orthodoxy of the six *āstika* systems thus bases itself on the fact that they intend to be nothing more than a comment, an interpretation, namely, a hermeneutic of the *Vedas*. Not only Hinduism, however, regards as an essential proposition of orthodoxy that which seeks to be nothing more than "*fides quaerens intellectum*" (faith seeking understanding, in Christianity), nothing more than commentary on Revelation (Judaism), nothing other than an exegesis of the Book (Islam), nothing beyond an authentic transmission of this deposit of revelation.

Every philosophy thus sets forth a hermeneutic, but a hermeneutic *sui generis*—and here already begins our comparison—that is not so easily limited to what is identified with philosophy in the modern Western tradition.

With the Indic terms for philosophy, we already notice a first deviation: the words *tarka* and *nyāya* designate a spiritual attitude, and the word *darśana*, which has become dominant in this context, means opinion, view,⁷ as also *ānvikṣiki* means something like inspection, investigation.⁸ In any case, it deals with a hermeneutics of wholeness that does not limit itself to a purely rational analysis or a merely intellectual interpretation. Indic philosophy aims at being rational, but not as simply offering rational speculation.⁹

Among these philosophical systems are two that wish to be nothing other than a strict hermeneutics: the two *mīmāṃsās*. The very word *mīmāṃsā* (inspection, investigation, or even more literally, the fact of concentrated thinking) justifies us in understanding *mīmāṃsā* as an authentic hermeneutics.¹⁰ At stake here is surely a hermeneutics that intends not to be

⁶ Alongside the three pairs of "philosophical" systems of orthodoxy (*nyaya-vaiśeṣika*, *sāṃkhya-yoga*, as well as the two systems of *mīmāṃsā*), in a more or less artificial construction are placed *cārvāka* (materialism) and Jainism as well as the four systems of later Buddhism: *vaibhaṣika*, *sautrantika*, *yogācāra*, and *madhyamika*.

⁷ From the root *dṛś*, "see the same."

⁸ There are still more names, such as the Sanskrit word *mata* (literally: something that is thought on) from the root *man*, meaning "thought" (cf. *μενος, μενοινω* in Greek; *meminisse, monere, mens* in Latin; *meinen* in German; "to mean, mind" in English); *vāda*, "same teaching" (literally: something that one expresses, of which one speaks, and so on). In India, philosophy has been understood, above all, as the method of investigation (J. Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique* [Hanoi-Paris, 1953], 2: section 1358).

⁹ Cf. my "Does Indian Philosophy Need Re-Orientations?" *East and West* 8, no. 1 (April 1957): 23ff.

¹⁰ From the root *man*, as already mentioned. Remarkable for the modern Indian spiritual attitude is the fact of emphasizing the rational, logical, namely, Cartesian character, through which the *mīmāṃsā* should be assured the position of a philosophy. Here, for informational purposes, a few examples of that: "It means the reasoning which has to be adopted in order to understand the connotation of a word or a sentence" (Pramathanath Tarkabhushan, *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā*, in *The Cultural Heritage of India* [Calcutta: Ramakrishna-Mission Institute of Culture, 1953], 3:160); "Attempts of Rational Inquiry" (S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* [Cambridge University Press, 1951], 1:370); "The method they adopt is with rational investigation or logical inquiry" (T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* [Mumbai: Chetana, 1971], 130); "Means a rational and deep insight into the *Veda*" (Zacharias, *An Outline of Hinduism* [Alwaye: J. M. Press, 1956], 257).

exclusively rational but also to lead us to an unrestricted acceptance of the saving message contained in the *Vedas*.¹¹

There are two kinds of *mīmāṃsā*, and because the *Vedas* are an object of hermeneutic investigation, there arises a twofold approach: *dharma* and *brahman*.

The "first investigation," *pūrva-mīmāṃsā*, deals with ritual obligations, the cult of cosmic order, the merit that results from it—namely the heaven that one earns for oneself (*svarga*) or the absolute liberation (*mokṣa*) that one reaches. One also speaks here of the *karma-mīmāṃsā*, for this presents the hermeneutics of actions, works, of the rituals, that is, redeeming events. The *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is actually the *mīmāṃsā* itself.

It is followed by the later *mīmāṃsā*, which one can also call the "highest" *mīmāṃsā*, namely the *uttara-mīmāṃsā*, usually identified as *vedānta*, or the philosophical system constituting the crown, the endpoint (*anta*) of the *Vedas*, and to which belong the most significant philosophers and the most authoritative directions of Hinduism. One calls the *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* also *brahma-mīmāṃsā* because its concern is to bring us nearer the essence of *brahman*, the highest reality, the Absolute.¹² It would be wrong, however, to remove the *vedānta* from the entire framework of Indic "philosophy" and consider it "pure" philosophy. Basically, the *vedānta* presents a kind of Hindū enlightenment.

While the *Brāhmaṇas* constitute the object of the first *mīmāṃsā*, the *Upaniṣads* present the theme of the second *mīmāṃsā*. We should remember that the *Brāhmaṇas* present the existential message of salvation for Hinduism: they contain the necessary cultic rituals and actions for attaining salvation; the *Upaniṣads*, by contrast, contain the teaching of salvation in speculative and theoretical form. What interests us here most of all is the first form of *mīmāṃsā*.

The Pūrva-mīmāṃsā

It is clear that we cannot present here the main characteristics of this system even in rough sketches. We limit ourselves merely to illuminating its basic concerns from an angle that seems decisive to us for the present demonstration. In no cultural realm of the world will one encounter such a pure and highly developed attempt.

The beginnings of the *pūrva-mīmāṃsā-darśana* are as early as those of the *Vedas* and the *Brāhmaṇas*. The most important source accessible to us is the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtra* of Jaimini from the second century before Christ.¹³ Further source materials can be provided for this.¹⁴ The great commentaries go back to the time between the fourth

¹¹ *Manas* from *man* (cf. *mens*). This can be translated as spirit, consciousness, or sound human understanding, but not as rationality or reason.

¹² Cf. the well-known verse, "*athato brahma-jijñāsa*" [Strive now to recognize *brahman*], with which the main text of *brahma-mīmāṃsā* begins, the *Brahma-sūtra* (I.1.1) of Bādarāyaṇa.

¹³ The variation in the dates given by experts is very revealing. T. M. P. Mahadevan (*Outlines of Hinduism*, p. 131) speaks of 400 BC; S. N. Dasgupta (*History of Indian Philosophy*, p. 370), and Jacobi (in Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique*, section 1370) provide the year 200 BC; M. Hiriyanna (*Outlines of Indian Philosophy* [London: Allen & Unwin, 1956], 301) and Keith (in Filliozat, *L'Inde Classique*) speak of the second century of our time, a date with which J. Gonda (*Die Religionen Indiens* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960], 307) also agrees.

¹⁴ For example, in the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali, and even in the *Dharma-sūtras*. The *mīmāṃsā* of Jaimini represents only one of the many schools; but except for the sources in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras* and a few other *sūtras*, we have at our disposal today no other original texts.

and seventh centuries,¹⁵ but we also possess important works from the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁶

This system is generally quite unknown in the West. Even modern Indian authors strongly influenced by post-Cartesian thought, who deny the status of philosophy to a system aimed only at being a commentary, distort the interpretation of the *mīmāṃsā* or speak exclusively of passages dealing with pure philosophical speculation.¹⁷

The Nature of the Vedas

Śruti, the Original Epiphany

We have already said that the *mīmāṃsā* is a pure hermeneutics. Now, every hermeneutics presupposes something given that is to be interpreted. This something is the Qur'an in Islam and revelation in Christianity. For orthodox Hinduism, it is the *Vedas* or, more precisely, *śruti*.

First of all, it should be emphasized for greater clarity that the *Vedas*, namely, the inspired books of Hinduism, are not to be considered "holy Scripture" in the sense of the Bible or the Qur'an, the sacred books of Christians and Muslims.¹⁸ The word *śruti* means neither "sacred Scripture" nor "word," but "reception of the Heard," that which is heard, or to fully catch the literal meaning, that which one hears with one's ears.¹⁹ But in a certain sense, the word "revelation" offers a less imprecise term for what *śruti* means to say. If the Qur'an presents a copy of its heavenly prototype, and as such *contains* salvation, if the Bible likewise *contains* the message of salvation from God to humanity, then *śruti* is the message, the revelation. It is no translation, no transmission from God to humanity. It does not even have an author, nor can it have one, for otherwise it would not be the immediately, definitively, ultimately Uttered.

If God has spoken, then He has done so at a particular time and in a very particular place; He has thus used a particular manner of expression and adapted Himself to a specific mentality to be understood. To partake in the fruits of such a revelation, one must know and understand what He intended to say, and for this purpose, one must know the forms

¹⁵ The most important ones, which constitute two systems of thinking and interpreting, are based on the well-known comment of Sabarasvāmin, who is called *Śābara-bhāṣya* (Ganganatha Jha, in his translation [Baroda: Oriental Institute], speaks of the year 57 BC; Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism*, p. 131, gives the year AD 200; and Hirianna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 301, cites the year 400). The first commentary stems from Prabhākara and is called *Bratī* (seventh century AD); the second and most important one stems from Kumarila Bhatta, comprising three works: *Sloka-Vārtikā*, *Tantra-Vārtikā*, and *Tup-Tikā* (eighth century AD). The famous Mandana Miśra, whom Śaṅkarācārya (born in the year AD 788) converted to Vedantism, was a *mīmāṃsaka*, a student of Kumarila Bhatta.

¹⁶ Cf. the works of G. Jha: *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā in Its Sources* (Banaras, 1942). *The Pūrva-mīmāṃsā-sūtras of Jaimini*, text and translation (Allahbad: Pānini Office).

¹⁷ Cf. most of the authors already mentioned, such as Dasgupta, Hirianna, Mahadevan, and others. In general, European Indologists adopted this dismissive judgment; E. Gauthier, *La pensée hindoue* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1958), does not even mention it.

¹⁸ It is not to be overlooked here that early Christianity understood "Scripture" only as the Old Testament, not as the New, and that the word "Bible" was first introduced only in the thirteenth century by Hugo von Trimberg (in F. König, *Religionswissenschaftliches Wörterbuch* [Freiburg: Herder, 1956]). Likewise, the word "Qur'an" in no way means "sacred Scripture," but "recitation" or "preaching." Cf. the Aramaic *qurjānā*, meaning *lection*.

¹⁹ From the root *śru*, "hear."

of expression, hence the cultural environment of the prophets. Furthermore, an institution that cares about passing on the transmitted substance of the faith and preserving its correct interpretation is essential. And here begins the work of hermeneutics.

If there is "revelation," that is, if there is a revelatory God who unveils truth hidden to human beings, we already have here the first hermeneutics. In this sense, "revelation" is nothing other than the divine hermeneutics of something being given; otherwise, revelation itself would be hidden and incomprehensible, thereby remaining without influence or effect on our lives.

The case in Hinduism is different, and one should beware of overhasty assimilation. Perhaps it is difference that serves unity most, rather than a superficial assimilation of one teaching to the other, or the victory that one religion carries off from the other. Better than revelation, which always seems to presuppose a revealer, one could thus say that *śruti* implies visualization, the appearance of ultimate reality, that which is revealed. The *Vedas* do not intend to be the revelation of God but the transference, the transmission of that which was, *in principio* (in the beginning), the original tradition, the unmediated visualization to those who hear the message and translate it into reality.

"*In principio*, God created the heavens and the earth,"²⁰ says the Old Testament in its concrete, earthly, historical, and personal religion. "*In principio* was the Word,"²¹ adds the mystical, eschatological, and Christian fulfillment of the Jewish promise in the New Testament, without displacing the original characteristics of the Old Testament. "*Sine principio* and without ending is He."²² "*Sine principio tu es*,"²³ for "He is the *principium*,"²⁴ where there was "neither non-being nor being,"²⁵ says this other religion to us, which does not claim to reveal what God "says" or "wants," but which simply makes visible to us some of the more practical dimensions of ultimate reality, which arise if one comes into immediate contact with the *śruti*. The *śruti* unveils Nobody, it has part in Nobody, and it also has Nobody standing behind it. The *Vedas* possess a validity that relies so entirely on itself that it excludes a God who would ground or guarantee its authority. Let us briefly explain that here.

Apauruṣeya, without Author

We first need to seek out the theoretical foundations and then clarify the meaning.

The *śruti* has no author; it is *apauruṣeya*, that is, it is not the fruit of human activity,²⁶ contrary to the heterodox view that considers it *pauruṣeya*, namely, a human work, but also in opposition to another orthodox stream, the *nyāya*, which sought a divine author behind it, out of fear at the consequences and demands that arise if the authority of the *śruti* is taken in a radically serious manner.

The reasoning of the *mīmāṃsā* is as follows: if the *śruti* had an author, then one would know of him as one indeed knows the authors of other sacred texts; however, since time immemorial no one has ever spoken of an author. Yet, knowing the author is absolutely essential for grasping the meaning of the words and rituals passed down to us—when, mark well, these words are first expressed and these rituals first introduced. Let us cite in this connection the example of the famous fourth century BC grammarian Pāṇini, who provides

²⁰ Gn 1:1.

²¹ Jn 1:1.

²² *Svetāśvatara-upaniṣad* V.13.

²³ *SU* IV.4.

²⁴ *SU* IV.5.

²⁵ *RV* X.129.1.

²⁶ The word derives from the expression *Puruṣa*, which means something like "man," or rather "person."

necessary explanations for us, together with the introduction of new terminology that would otherwise not be understood. Yet, one grasps and follows the *śruti* without having a key for it. Still more: If the issue should happen to be not merely about rituals but about *authentic* rituals, these must be carried out in the sense and intention of the author, the founder. The *śruti*, however, holds as unnecessary any provision of knowledge about this (nonexistent) intention, because the *śruti* alone is self-sufficient. We have here the negative aspect of evidence: it allows no proof that the *śruti* has an author.

The positive reasoning, developed through back-and-forth discussions and disputations, adds that, if there were an author, this could only be a human being, for only a human being is capable of expressing the proverbs and the words that we find in the *Vedas*. Nobody, however, is in a position to form words and sentences without connecting them to preceding words and sentences. The assumed author would thus in principle do nothing other than manipulate already existing words and sentences; consequently, this is not about a real author. Even if he brought forth a true creation, he would not be in a position to convey the meaning of his words and sentences. The *Vedas* are therefore the primary visualization, the first appearance, with no other primordial ground having preceded them. "*In principio* was the Logos" is the fundamental truth of the *mīmāṃsā*, but this Word cannot be separated from the sound that constitutes its graspable reality. Moreover, this Logos as Word, as Son, as Image of the Father's primal silence, of the originating Origin, can neither be confirmed nor controverted.²⁷

The possibility of a "God from God," a "Light from Light," a "true God from true God," is not explicitly contemplated by the *mīmāṃsā*, but the question is not so distant that it could not be a main concern of the *mīmāṃsā*. However, we wish to limit ourselves here to hermeneutics.

It seems to me that the basic foundation of this attitude lies in the unprecedented attempt to become the only hermeneutics of Hinduism, and thereby preserve the validity and the authority of the *Vedas*.

The *mīmāṃsā* in fact goes so far as to deny the existence of God as creator and destroyer of the world, in order to leave the eternity and the ultimate validity of the *Vedas* untouched.²⁸ If revelation only means announcing a truth, revealing a teaching (and not, first of all, making the Revealed, the Revealer visible), then there is no way to avoid the relativism of every revelation and the subjectivity of all interpretations.

Whatever can be said regarding the atheism of the *mīmāṃsā* or its silence about God,²⁹ nothing at all stands above the *śruti*, and the authority of the *Vedas* is final because they are the author of themselves. This *auctoritas* would be no definitive one if there were still another author.

For this reason, the *mīmāṃsā* must clarify two things: How can one follow the *śruti*, the highest hermeneutic law, and what is the nature of that which is "revealed" in the *Vedas*? We

²⁷ "Fons ergo ipse et origo est totius divinitatis" [He himself is therefore the origin and source of the entire Godhead], says the Council of Toledo XI in the year 675 (see *Denz.*, 275).

²⁸ *Na kadācit anidīṣam jagat* [In no era will the world be different than it is now] is a well-known *mīmāṃsā* saying.

²⁹ P. Tārkabhaṣan, *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā*, p. 167, emphasizes that neither Jaimini nor Sabarasyāmin, and still less Kumārila, denied the existence of God, though they preferred to maintain silence on this question, which only the later commentators dealt with. There is no absolute clarity here (Kumārila Bhāṭṭa, *Sloka-vārtikā* [Banaras: Chowkhamba Series (1898–99), § 133, p. 673], where the creation, *śṛṣṭi*, and the dissolution of the world, *pralaya*, are denied), but N.B. one would be guilty of anachronism and imprecision if one were to classify this system as atheistic—for example, the entire theory of *apūrva*, a kind of transcendent energy.

will pursue these two questions in this order through our demonstration.

The Pramāṇas, Means of Knowledge

We touch here upon a central point of every philosophy, a point treated at great length in the Indic philosophical systems: What are the criteria of knowledge? Or expressed in Indic concepts: What are the criteria of true knowledge, what are the *pramāṇas* (means of true knowledge) that allow us access to epistemological truth (*pramā*)?

Each Indic system has its own series of *pramāṇas* at its disposal. While there are merely four *pramāṇas* for the *nyāya* (perception or identification, conclusion, comparison or analogy, and evidence), the *mīmāṃsā* of the Kumārila Bhāṭṭa school knows of six, namely, the four just mentioned plus the presumption or implication, and the noncomprehension or recognition of negation of nothing.

All these media lead to valid knowledge; that is true on the basis of its immediacy. That only memory is not reckoned among the *pramāṇas* is instructive to discover. The reason for this is based on the fact that it depends on earlier experience, and thus fails to exhibit the value of immediacy. A truth entrusted to memory—that is, a simple transmission mediated with the help of memory, the acceptance of a revelation or message of salvation constructed on the experience of others—has utterly no value for orthodox Hinduism. A faith cannot be based on the faith of others, nor knowledge on a hermeneutic that is not immediate. Still more: A personal faith based upon a direct experience that someone else had in the past, and that is now perpetuated merely in memory, offers no true faith for Hinduism. In other words, either a tradition is further mediation of something living that offers itself a second time and lets itself be directly present, or it offers absolutely no tradition at all, and in this case it must be rejected. The preservation or transmission of a mere doctrine that one has not made one's own is utterly worthless as an authentic religious hermeneutic.

We now arrive at *mīmāṃsā*'s highest hermeneutic law.

Svataṇ-prāmāṇya, Self-Validity

The philosophical basis for the *pūrva-mīmāṃsā* is the *svataṇ-prāmāṇya*, the self-validity of knowledge or its essential untraceability, for knowledge is the ultimate criterion that renders judgment on everything, even on doubt or errors of knowledge. If one has to fall back on something else to certify some knowledge, then this knowledge itself must likewise also be grounded in a third knowledge, and so on ad infinitum.

The epistemological disputes among the various philosophical systems of India are of highest interest and reveal an exceptional philosophical maturity. We want to limit ourselves here to demonstrating why the *mīmāṃsā* has the tendency to advance such a teaching, and we will thereby arrive at the crucial point of its hermeneutics.

Let us look at the *Vedas*, that is, the *śruti*. If we do not acknowledge the *svataṇ-prāmāṇya*, the fundamental validity per se of the *Vedas*, then we must seek deeper assistance in an initial hermeneutics, which requires another hermeneutics for proof and understanding of the first, thereby resulting in an infinite regress.

For this reason, the *mīmāṃsā* must very consistently deny that the *śruti* itself presents a hermeneutics, namely, a hermeneutics that God makes accessible to humans, as we have already indicated. The *mīmāṃsā* also has to refute our hermeneutics of the *śruti* by proving that the sole original hermeneutics is given directly by the *Vedas* without need of yet another hermeneutics. The later interpretations are rational and belong only to the realm of instruction, not of religious dispensation. India certainly does not underestimate the pluralism

of hermeneutics for instruction, but we are concerned here with an existential level that precedes any interpretation.

Proofs of the inner validity of all knowledge are simple: knowledge as such is far from truth and error, for these valuations belong to the judgment rendered later, concerning knowledge. The validity and even the invalidity of all knowledge are recognized together with knowledge itself. Any knowledge whose validity is not recognized as such would be no knowledge at all.

Error is invalid knowledge. Now, the knowledge of the invalidity of some knowledge can be explained on the basis of two facts: the first concerns error in the instrument of knowledge itself (somebody without good eyesight perceiving a snake that is actually a rope); the second is the discovery of incompatibility of the first knowledge with the following, later experience—for example, if one thinks to perceive a snake in the distance that reveals itself as a rope upon a closer approach. This second perception will be considered true if confirmed by a series of experiences that one has with ropes, but not with snakes.

Now, in the *Vedas*' case, the self-validating knowledge cannot be invalid. The invalidity of knowledge cannot derive from the source and the means of knowledge itself, because the *śruti* is a matter of a literal and direct testimony of words and sounds conveyed directly to us in the *Vedas*. The second source of error also does not apply in this case, because the religious knowledge of the *śruti* cannot possibly contrast with later experiences, since the realm of religious knowledge *per definitionem* stands far above every other knowledge, and its object (the otherworldly, supernatural reality) cannot be proved empirically. Accordingly, no other *pramāṇa* can stand in opposition to the *śruti*. The only possibility would be a contradiction within the *śruti* itself (such that particular passages are not in harmony with each other). The *mīmāṃsā* actually takes as its duty the task of working on the inner laws of interpretation, which should prove to us that there is no contradiction among the various parts of the *śruti*.³⁰

Śabda-pramāṇa, the Word

The *pramāṇa*, or medium of knowledge, that possesses the most significance for the *mīmāṃsā* and attained its highest development in this system is the *śabda-pramāṇa*, or evidence of the word. It is fundamentally concerned with more than an analysis of the word as the medium of knowledge. The *mīmāṃsā* develops an entire metaphysics, and even a cosmology of language. The basic idea remains ever the same: if the *Vedas* are definitive, last, and final, if there is nothing above or before them that would serve as their foundation, if there is not even a revelatory God, then also what the *Vedas* "reveal" to us, what they convey to us, namely, the very words of the *Vedas*, must present something definitive and final without going further back to a preexisting or independent content.

Śabda means the word in its entire wholeness, namely, with its "sound" and "meaning." If we separated one or the other from the word, this would mean the death of the word, merely a corpse of the word remaining left over. According to the *mīmāṃsā*, there exists thus a natural and essential relationship between the word, the word as tone, and the thing, the concrete object. The "name" belongs to the object, and the two are indivisible. There never were names without things and things without names. This is not about the strict

³⁰ Because the whole *śruti* must be seen, in principle, as a unity that emphasizes only one thing: salvation, initially called *svarga*, then *mokṣa* or *brahman*, respectively. Cf. *Brahma-sūtra* I.1.4. Cf. also Christian thought, according to which the last and only object of the Bible is Christ; this is valid above all for the Johannine insight (cf. Jn 1:45; 2:22; 5:39, 46; 12:16, 41; 19:28; 20:9; Lk 24:27, 44; 2 Tm 3:15; 1 Pet 1:11).

delimitation of a meaning, for the *mīmāṃsā* advocates no epistemological relationship, but an ontological one of "being with." There are not two worlds: one that is perceptible and audible, and the other, the spiritual, accessible to the intellect, to reason. Naturally, there is a conventional, derived language, but this merely proves that a natural, original language exists, that represents not some kind of superstructure of Being, no projection of reason onto an intentionality of Being, but an existential and constitutive dimension of Being. In short: reality is the word, and the word is reality, for the world possesses the structure of tone and of logical clarity. "In the beginning was the Logos," not only because "the Logos was God," but because "the Logos was Being," the *mīmāṃsā* would explain. For the Logos is the last core, the true reality of the world, one could add. The theocosmism of Hindū *vāc* unites with the theandris of Christian Logos.

That does not mean to say that all of reality is a word, or that every word is reality. The intersection of these two is precisely the *śruti*. The "revelation" reveals itself precisely here: there exists a primal word that reveals Being and its dynamism to us, and this word is *Veda*, "wisdom," "knowledge"; there exists transcendental Being, a saving reality that emerges in the word, and this word is *Veda*.

This is not a proper place to point to what the *śruti* itself says about the word. But let us just think, for example, about such texts as follow.

"The word (*vāc*) is *brahman*. It is the Lord."³¹ "Through this word and through this, his soul, He created all [the world], everything that exists."³² "But Prajāpati [the Lord of Gods] is the word, undoubtedly, the highest word. . . ."³³ "In the beginning was only this Prajāpati. His word (*vāc*) was He. The word was his Second. Observing, He reflected: 'I will let this word go out from me. It will bring forth all [the world] and complete it.' And from Him went out the word, and everything was formed by it."³⁴ We could refer here to the entire *Vedic* speculation, and those speculations of later centuries regarding the holy syllable *AUM*, in order to emphasize what the *mīmāṃsā* intends to express.³⁵

It is impossible for us to summarize here the long and wordy interpretations of the *mīmāṃsā*. It distinguishes, for example, between *varṇa*, which means so much as an articulated, eternal, omnipresent, unified tone, and *dhvani*, the specific and sometimes unarticulated tone. The first concept deals with something general. For, if *varṇa* A, for example, has been expressed ten times, then there have not been ten *varṇas* expressed, but ten times the same *varṇa* A.

The underived character of the *varṇas* or, if one wishes, the eternity of the Word, does not suffice to prove that the *Vedas* have no origin. This in fact is a necessary but not sufficient condition. The positive proof is provided by the *anupūrvi* through the particular sequence in which words appear in the *Vedas*, for without this criterion, every literary work whose origin and author are unknown could present itself as eternal. The *mīmāṃsā* strives for an inner hermeneutics here, but there comes a point where faith alone appears without drawing upon any proof. In fact, only the *Vedas* are without author, not because the authors are known for other literary works and unknown for the *Vedas*, but because the other texts do not claim to announce a message of salvation. There is thus a kind of indirect proof, for this claim of the *Vedas* is unique in Hinduism.

³¹ *BU* I. 3.21.

³² *SB* X.6.5.5.

³³ *SB* V.1.5.6.

³⁴ *TMB* XX.14.2.

³⁵ Cf. *MandU* 12; *KathU* 1.2.15ff., etc.

We have now arrived at a point where the *mīmāṃsā* must acknowledge the necessity for something outside philosophy to escape a *circulus vitiosus*, for the untraceability of the words of the *Veda* is only justified by the fact that they are words of salvation conveying a message with contents. The *mīmāṃsā* says that the words appear to us in a particular order that mediates something to us—an order seen as holy, for the *mīmāṃsā* believes that the *Vedas* impart and reveal ultimate wisdom to us, and therefore *are* the ultimate wisdom. One cannot declare the *mīmāṃsā* belief as invalid and maintain that the *śruti* has a compiler; at the same time, however, one can just as little prove and demonstrate that it has no author. We stand here at a threshold: posing no further questions, the *mīmāṃsā* holds to the truth and the reality of the *śruti*, for the *mīmāṃsā* believes the *śruti*. Precisely because it holds to the *śruti*, it works out an entire theory of the *śruti*. It believes in the *śruti* on the basis of transmission: tradition provides the guarantee for the *śruti*. On this sheer, stark belief, the *mīmāṃsā* constructs its entire hermeneutics, wholly for the purpose of illustrating and justifying this free, given belief.

The Revealed and the Revealer

The above remarks appear to demand theological reflection. In the beginning was the Logos, that is, the *vāc*: an assertion maintained by both Christianity and Hinduism. Now, the symbiosis of Christianity and Hellenism brought forth its own hermeneutics of the Logos, which, although it should not be wholly equated with Christian belief in the revealed Logos, yet pressed the entire history of Christianity in a certain direction.

Based on Paul and the Greek tradition—which prioritized seeing, the eye, contemplation; in short, *θεωρία*—a large part of the Christian tradition interpreted the Logos of revelation as Image, as Icon of the Father.³⁶ Certainly, this Logos is always understood as the Word, yet expressed as Image, symbolized, and thus understood as visible.

The Eastern Church preserved iconology as the core, as the most precious gem of the Revealed One. The Revealed One is the Icon of invisible God. The Christian West followed this train of thought a step further, and the expressed, “iconographical” Word became the “written” word; naturally not only the word in the Bible but also the word written in our hearts, and most of all in our spirit. In short, the Word became the intelligible word, the *verbum mentis*, pure comprehensibility, and later even the *ratio* of the Scholastics.

One is reminded, for example, of the psychological theory of the intra-trinitarian processes as acts of rationality and of will, the identification of God with pure Spirit, and finally the interpretation of Spirit as pure intellect and intelligibility. Think of the description of the final stage of human divinization as *visio beatifica*, and the Greek *θεωρία* being turned into Christian contemplation. One also recalls the medieval theories of knowledge, from illumination to *intellectus agens*, and *ratio* as the ultimate core of Being.

A consequence of this spiritual attitude that directly concerns us here is the exceptional lightness with which one, without identifying the revelation entirely with the Revealed One, speaks of Christian revelation as the emergence of a divine intelligibility, which would be otherwise hidden from our spirit—consequently as the revelation of a higher knowledge that, in the end, would be what the Logos has revealed to us through His coming. This “something,” interpreted as spiritual core, as comprehensible message, would be the Revelation, the revelation of the Logos, which our spirit (theology) should lay bare and explain, and so on. For this reason, the hermeneutics of revelation has now become the core of all

³⁶ Cf. Col 1:15 where Christ is called the “image of the invisible God.”

Christianity. There would be no faith without a hermeneutics of faith; one could not assume the revelation without knowing it, without a hermeneutics. It would then be as if the Logos had spoken to us once and for all, as if He had left us behind, orphaned, leaving us only a revelation whose right interpretation would be required later. The church would not be the Bride, the Mystical Body, not even the "container and offerer" of Christ the Lord, but merely an institution that safeguards a correct hermeneutics.

I am aware of the insufficiency of this overview, which is anyway well grounded in its general terms. I would like to compare the stream of thought just demonstrated with the other side of the Indo-European tradition, and wonder, in this context, if *another* aspect of this revealed Logos has not been a little overlooked and neglected. It would really be the most extreme paradox if we could show that what India recalls to the Western tradition is precisely that aspect of His incarnation.

In fact, the *vāc* which was at the beginning is not limited—not by the *mīmāṃsā*, at least—to the Word as Image, or to the intelligible word. The *vāc* of the *Vedas* is the Word, but the complete Word in its materiality, its cosmic echo, its visible Scripture, in its sense and meaning. The *vāc* of the beginning, the *vāc* of the *Vedas*, is not the revelation but the Revealed One; it is the crystallization of *brahman*, its compression in space and time.

This *vāc* possesses no further content, no intelligible core deeper than itself, no message requiring interpretation by reference to something beyond itself. The *vāc* is the primal sacrament, unifying in itself the reality of the "three worlds." The image, the tone, the word, the sense, and even the body are the *vāc*. The Logos of Hinduism is a resounding, material, outspoken, written, living, and spiritual word. The *vāc* contains no revelation, but is the revealed reality itself. Everything exists in it and through it;³⁷ it was at the beginning,³⁸ and it will also persist to the end.³⁹ It is the sacrament, the Mystery hidden from the foundation of the world.⁴⁰

Only one thing Hinduism does not say: *καὶ ὁ λόγος σαρκὶ ἐγενετο*, "And the Logos became flesh." Christian emphasis is not only upon the "flesh" but also upon *ἐγενετο*, the Word that *became* flesh, that became human. We have here something new from Christianity. And precisely here Hinduism offers a notion to the contemporary Western world—a notion that had been somewhat hidden through that *new* thing from Christianity: the sacramental construction of the world, the Word-related character of the cosmos, or, to use a concept I have at heart, the christophanic construct of the whole creation, whereby every contingent being is nothing else than a Christophany. The primal Mystery hidden from the very beginning remains concealed in the *Vedas*, which entail it without entirely revealing it.⁴¹ Through Christ, however, it will come to pass that the veil will drop.⁴²

The Logos is thus the word, the living word, image, and even conceivability, but also resonant sound, matter, flesh. *Cum quibus et nostras voces . . . dicentes: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus*,⁴³ says the Christian liturgy when it speaks on the final state of the deified world. We speak here not of a simple "vision"! But we cannot pursue this idea further here.

The *mīmāṃsā* tells us that there is certainly no revelation in the abstract sense, but the Revealed in the concrete sense; that there is no message one has to decipher, but a message

³⁷ Col 1:17.

³⁸ Col 1:15.

³⁹ 1 Cor 15:24–28.

⁴⁰ Ep 1:9; 3:9; Rom 16:25; Col 1:26; etc.

⁴¹ Cf. my *Die vielen Götter und der eine Herr* (Weilhem: Barth, 1963).

⁴² Mk 15:38, etc.

⁴³ "Together with whom [angels and saints] we also raise our voices, and say: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord. . . ."

one should receive. Christianity tells us nothing different. It does reveal more to us, however: the Name of the One who was sent. And it speaks not only about the Revealed but also the Revealing One; and not about a revealer of something, of a revelation (in this case, it would deal merely with a prophet, the bringer of a message of salvation). Christianity offers us the self-revealing Revealer. Christian revelation, in essence, is not the revelation of a secret that one did not "know"; it is the descent of God himself; it is not the revelation of something, of a teaching, but the manifestation, the appearance of *Someone*. The One who becomes visible is God himself. Now, this ever-incomprehensible, inexpressible God stands beyond every hermeneutic. One does not interpret God: one receives Him, accepts Him. "But his own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, He gave the power to become children of God."⁴⁴

The true task of hermeneutics consists in helping us receive God, and the *mīmāṃsā* teaches us that hermeneutics alone does not suffice.

Conclusion

What is gained for speculations on contemporary Western Christianity from all these considerations? We would like to make two more remarks: one about the tradition of hermeneutics, the other about the hermeneutics of transmission.

The Transmission of Hermeneutics: Orthodoxy

The encounter with Hinduism allows room for an initial doubt: Did the West perhaps identify transmission too closely with hermeneutics, specifically in the sense that primary emphasis was put on orthodoxy? Granted, the fact that tradition conveys "orthodoxy" to us—that is, an accurate and right *doxa*—is important. For a religion, the imparting of true teaching, the transmission of orthodox belief, constitutes a major concern. True teaching requires transference, and therefore needs a tradition. Doctrine, church teaching, and the transmission of orthodoxy are essential. True teaching must be assimilated, deepened, and developed, so as to undergo further development, deepening, and inner growth.

From the perspective of the "transmission of hermeneutics" appears the problem of the Scripture-Tradition relationship, which has been so fiercely debated in recent times. If tradition means exclusively the transference of orthodoxy, understood as the transmission of true interpretation, then it deals with the transmission of teaching, that is, the transmission of the correct sense, true teaching. If tradition primarily means the transmission of an intellectual content, we are confronted with the problem of two sources for revelation: Scripture and Tradition—that is, the question concerns the channels through which the revelation as instruction comes to us. Seen from this perspective, Christian teaching *is* obviously transmitted to us through Scripture *and* Tradition.

But the insufficiency of the question is immediately clear if one recognizes the deep and inner connection of both sources, to the extent that one without the other offers no authentic source of revelation. Without the hermeneutics of transmission, and independent of the church that possesses its key, no book, no holy Scripture can be seen as the "source" of revelation. In the same way, no tradition, torn from the context that actually makes it such, would be a source of revelation; nor would any transmission not carried by a living message contained in the Scripture. We know that the early church regarded the Old Testament as

⁴⁴ Jn 1:11–12.

holy Scripture; the New Testament was designated not as Scripture but as word, message, as living interpretation of the Old Testament.⁴⁵

The difficulties increase even more if one takes into further consideration that Christian transmission is not exhausted with the transference of a hermeneutics, that is, with a teaching or its interpretation. The whole Christian *traditio clavium, gratiae, sacramentorum* (transmission of St. Peter's "keys," of grace, of sacraments) does not only imply a *traditio doctrinae* (transmission of doctrine). It is noteworthy that the very concept of διδασκαλία, a Christian expression of the second century, means *traditio* as well as *successio*. The true διδασκαλία is thus not only a simple transmission of a teaching; it is closely connected with a person, with the succession that carries the whole transmission forward.⁴⁶

These days, for a different reason, the identification of tradition with the transmission of a hermeneutics can hardly be sustained. One of the most conspicuous contemporary phenomena is doubtless the encounter of religions. This encounter takes place on the basis of equality at the round table of world cultures. The time of "political Christianity," of "world kingdoms" and "colonialism," is over, and we are today in a much better situation for understanding the other religions from the inside. All this leads to a willing acceptance of *pluralism* and a differentiated manner of thinking it through in a theological sense as well, in other words, to the basic possibility of a plurality of hermeneutics for the same transmission.

In summary, we can say that tradition is something more than the transmission of a hermeneutic, also more than the transmission of a teaching. One passes down, *primo et per se*, not the transmission but the Revealer, the Mystery in the Pauline sense. That is authentically Christian and in the sense of the Christian tradition; likewise, it is also the notion to be gained from the efforts made, and the limitations set by the *mīmāṃsā*: true transmission is always a "*tradidit seipsum*,"⁴⁷ a descent of God and an immediate Presence. True transmission is therefore not exclusively and originally a transmission of a hermeneutic, the transmission of some arbitrary meaning, nor the transmission of a *kérygma*; rather, it means to carry forward a living Logos, to transmit God to Man. No religion is only orthodoxy.

The problematic of a large part of Protestant theology with regard to the Gospel and the Law (above all, in connection with Karl Barth's famous lecture "Gospel and Law") offers a further example for the attempt to break through hermeneutic limitations. Christ is the completion of the Law⁴⁸ and its fulfillment.⁴⁹

The Hermeneutics of Transmission: Orthopraxis

In every hermeneutics of a tradition, one always seeks something lasting, constant, valid in itself, something that outlives history and cultural transformations. Now, if one seeks this

⁴⁵ Cf. the patristic sources in Y. Congar, *La tradition et les traditions*, pp. 47–49. Also the relevant remarks of J. Ratzinger in K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *Episkopat und Primat (Quaestiones disputatae II)* (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), 45–52. Also penetrating are the considerations by G. Shrenk in Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 1:766ff.

⁴⁶ "Transmission is thus certainly never a simple, anonymous propagation of a teaching, but is bound up with a person and is a living Word that has its concrete reality in faith. And vice versa: succession is not an assumption of the powers of office, but engagement for the Word," J. Ratzinger, in Rahner & Ratzinger (1961), p. 45.

⁴⁷ Ep 5:2, 25.

⁴⁸ Rom 10:4, etc.

⁴⁹ Rom 3:31ff.; 8:4, etc.

element, above all, on the level of the essences, the ideas, the teachings, the philosophical categories, the *noēmata*, if one seeks this constant thing in an orthodox sense, no sufficiently encompassing basis is to be found that would also remain firm and enduring over the course of historical transformations as well as cultural upheavals. One speaks, then, of a doctrine that finds itself in a state of growth, development, and self-fulfillment, yet without holding equally firmly to the other pole—that is, that the ground slips a little beneath our feet, such that a necessary reaction occurs on the part of those who think to see in every transformation a faulty development of dogma's unchangeable truth.

Since the history of Christianity was bound to a single culture, since the unity of humanity and human nature was identified with a single cultural and philosophical phenomenon, which also held good for the theological realm, one could still hold tightly to the belief that a doctrine was generally binding and unchangeable because it was, strictly speaking, bound to "something": something standing over the teaching, indeed, even something supernatural.

Now, today that is no longer possible. Today we see and discover the inexhaustible multiplicity of human nature, the pluralism of cultures, even the legitimate existence of other religions. Ultimate universality cannot be found in the noetic realm. Rediscovering the meaning of what could be designated as orthopraxis is necessary, and it is so in every tradition.

But even if one succeeded in finding a *doctrina perennis*—a philosophical or categorical system that would be really lasting and unchangeable through all the heterogeneity of thoughts, cultures, and so on, even with the goal of determining the unchangeable teaching for all time—one would just by this destroy the basic claim of Christian tradition: namely, to deliver a message of salvation and to belong to the supernatural order. No teaching can, *per definitionem*, raise this claim. What one wants to hand on are no arbitrary goods, no arbitrary contents of some teaching, but a *depositum fidei*,⁵⁰ a living faith, an active faith, a consummated faith, action, and reality, a comprehensive human bearing.

One cannot "have" faith, but only realize it and make it present. To preserve faith means "to stand in it," to put it into practice, to participate in the movement of the Mystical Body toward its fullness. The sharing of faith cannot occur as communication, as transmission, outside of the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean that there can also be no sharing of a teaching, and that one should not strive toward preserving development, growth, continuation within orthodoxy. Yet tradition, in its wholeness, cannot be limited to transmission in an orthodox framework and thereby forget that other, still more essential dimension.

Even if one wanted to take refuge in a generalization by speaking of preserving and transmitting "the truth," it could clearly be seen that *emeth*-truth, which goes far beyond the realm of teaching, cannot be preserved by simple *alētheia*-truth. Ontological truth eludes the realm of judgment; it originates in the order of essence, inhering in the core of Being, and does not belong to the level of *Dasein* (being-there) and existence, or to the realm of temporality.⁵¹

The Christian truth—and this means the full truth—is Christ, Christ as person. Precisely this person, this entire Christ, is equality with the Father in eternity and with the world, and precisely insofar as the world moves toward fulfillment, *ἀποκαταστασις*, *ἀνακεφαλαιωσις*.⁵²

⁵⁰ 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12.

⁵¹ Cf. my "Die existentielle Phänomenologie der Wahrheit," in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* (München, 1956), 27–54.

⁵² Ep 1:10; Ac 3:21; 1 Cor 15:28; etc.

The true hermeneutics of tradition thus reveals to us that what is transmitted is Christ, but not only Christ according to flesh,⁵³ rather the living Christ, the Word and the Sacrament, the Mystery hidden in God from eternity.⁵⁴

All this poses no difficulty for India, because it sees far more ascent and integration in "tradition" than descent and transmission (*tradere*). One can here ascertain that a certain Greek-Latin juridical understanding of inheritance defined the Western view of tradition. It is regarded as a special case of inheritance law: one inherits goods or a doctrine or some spiritual property. One always mediates something this way. The basic Indic concept is entirely different: the principle of "succession" is rather an integration; it takes place less as a transmission of property and more as a community of goods based on a participation in being. "The son receives not the goods of his father; he adopts his father's personhood, which then also bestows upon him a right over the property without the property being transferred. One inherits not *from* his father, one inherits his father."⁵⁵ Catholicism has always maintained that one must belong to the church in order to enter the tradition, and India can perhaps help in understanding that this is not a matter of arbitrariness or monopoly, and that the basis of inheritance is not transmission but reception and participation.

True tradition is the continuation of the present, the "showing up" of the Revealer, not merely repetition or remembrance or intellectual assent to doctrinal content. What tradition passes on is the actualization, *hic et nunc*, in space and time, of the living Christ: the real Christ, who is neither a Christ conceived or interpreted with the help of an arbitrary hermeneutics, nor a Christ whose character merely belongs to the past, but the complete Christ of yesterday, today, and forever,⁵⁶ who is offered to us in the liturgical action through our participation with faith, hope, and love—the same action by which the Pantokrator creates, redeems, and glorifies the whole world.

One connects with the sources, with the *illud tempus*, not by help of tradition but *in* tradition. One enters into connection with the *illud tempus* through what happens within tradition. Tradition is no bond that chains us to the past; rather, it is a performance by which the past reaches us, and with it the *tempiternal*, soteriological principle mediated by the entire tradition. Not through help of the tradition does a Christian become *one with* Christ and believe in Him; not by means of a clever and educated hermeneutics does the believer drink from the original wellsprings and lay the foundation of a personal faith. Rather, *in* tradition one finds Christ, *hic et nunc*, in the mystery of sacrifice; *in* tradition is Christ present to the believer. This explains the expression *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The church is nothing other than the Christ who is "left behind" for us, "transmitted" unto us, "passed on" to us. Christianity is thus the *tradition*, the transmission and delivery of God to Man, His own Incarnation.

Even from a phenomenological viewpoint, one can add that tradition is only then an authentic—religious and Christian—tradition if it requires no hermeneutics in order to be transmitted, if it can be conveyed even to the illiterate, the poor, the primitive—that is, if it does not depend on a *certain* hermeneutics, because it stands higher than all hermeneutics and precedes them; if it cannot be exhausted or fully interpreted by hermeneutics; if always something remains that cannot be subjected to hermeneutics.

⁵³ 2 Cor 5:16.

⁵⁴ Ep 1:9; 3:9; Rom 16:25; Col 1:26; etc.

⁵⁵ P. Mus, *Barabudur* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1935), I:12.

⁵⁶ Heb 13:8.

From the endeavors and difficulties of *mīmāṃsā* in pursuit of a pure, comprehensive hermeneutics, we can surely learn one thing: the recognition of its limitations.

The term "faith" is what Hinduism would use to label the stop in the causal chain of interpretations or the investigation of meanings. Only faith can offer a pause in our endless thinking process, and realize the *ἀναγκη στήναι* in the interpretation of interpretations.

Likewise, not wanting to base itself on an unlimited hermeneutics, Christianity can have its aim described as an experience of faith, for only supernatural correspondence—participation in a higher light—can bring us to receive Something higher on the basis of an inner and ineffable conversion, Something inaccessible to all hermeneutics.

Between tradition and hermeneutics, this tension therefore exists: every hermeneutics as such presupposes a tradition, but Christian tradition, and religious transmission, is more than a hermeneutics.

This factor inaccessible to thought—which faith alone, in the depths of its free and gracious essence as a gift, reveals to us—is concealed between two poles connected by the whole tradition (and by its hermeneutics, which interpret the sacred texts and yet touch neither extremity). At one extreme, a hidden, ineffable, freely given starting point: the creatureliness of our existence. At the other extreme, an endpoint, likewise hidden, endless, (in hope) handed to us, and likewise freely given: the divinity, the divinization of our being.

Finally, we can summarize: Authentic transmission possesses a hermeneutics that hermeneutics knows not.

SOME PHENOMENOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF TODAY'S HINDŪ SPIRITUALITY¹

*Nor by speech, nor by mind
can He be gained; nor by sight.
He is gained by those who can affirm,
"He Is."*

KāthU II.3.12

*Religiositas custodiet et justificabit cor.²
Ecclesiasticus 1.18*

Introduction

The world is troubled about the future of religion, not only because it is threatened from the outside, but also because it seems to be exposed to danger on the inside. Beliefs are no longer protected by the walls of a city or the weapons of an empire, and while the mutual influence between the various religions continues to grow, the tension between integrity of faith and comprehension of the other, orthodoxy and tolerance, holiness and catholicity, is perceived more acutely every day. In the encounter between religions, theology and philosophy have the last word, at least with regard to the sphere of the theoretical, but as far as knowledge of the object of our discussion is concerned, phenomenology takes the fore. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is clearly expressed in its title, however unappealing it may appear.

Phenomenology

A study of a phenomenological nature must be characterized by a degree of scientific sobriety, not only in the style in which it is compiled but also in its statements themselves, for the very fact that it refrains from drawing any kind of conclusion. The sole task of phenomenology is to provide useful material for philosophical analysis and theological speculation; in itself, in fact, it is equally extraneous to both disciplines.

Applied to similar subjects, the phenomenological method is completely without expectations and presents considerable difficulties. It represents the happy medium between, on the one hand, the superficial experiences of the tourist, the journalist, and the investigator aiming at mere inquiry and, on the other, the profound studies of the philosopher. The method that is typical of phenomenology is neither academic research, which destroys

¹ Original text: R. Panikkar, *Maya e Apocalisse. L'incontro dell'induismo e del cristianesimo* (Rome: Abete, 1966), chap. 1.

² "Religiosity shall keep and justify the heart," as it was translated in the Vulgate Bible.

spontaneity and alters the facts by placing itself between them, nor the theoretical study of ideas, books, and sources, which should never be confused with the direct observation of crude factual inconsistencies. This method is based on the intuition that is born of a certain type of observation (phenomenological), that is, from living in contact with people, from becoming one with them, while, at the same time, remaining separate, solely for the purpose of sociological inquiry. Our concern, however, is not to describe the phenomenological method in relation to religious and sociological problems, but to apply it. The results will speak for themselves. We wish merely to find the right formulas for expressing what readers would be able to discover on their own.

Hinduism

It has often been said that Hinduism is so vague, vast, and multiform that it eludes all possible definition. To such critics, Hinduism is not a religion but, rather, an ensemble of religions, ranging from the most "primitive" animism to the most abstract *advaitism*. It all depends, of course, on what we expect a religion to be. Putting aside all terminological discussion, however, we can begin by identifying two important characteristics that are typical of Hinduism.

1. Hinduism is a religion that cannot be *de-fined*, because it has no limits within which it may be circumscribed. It does not, in fact, have specific dogmas or particular rituals, or even any real organization. Even the most fundamental ideas, such as those of God, *mokṣa*, *karman*, or *dharma*, can be interpreted in completely different ways. We would, therefore, find ourselves in utter confusion if we were to overlook its second characteristic, which gives meaning to the first.

2. Hinduism, for the very fact that it is not an idea, does not need to be a consistent idea. Likewise, since it is not a doctrine it is not bound to any kind of doctrine. The very name "Hinduism" is unfitting and overshadows its true nature. A real Hindū is quite unlikely to define himself as a Hindū. He will say, "I have been called *Hindū* by those who want to distinguish me from themselves. It was the Muslim who first called me *Hindū*, by which he meant that I was not Muslim. The Christians also call us *Hindū*, to separate us from them." The best name for Hinduism is *sanātana-dharma*, the immortal *dharma*, in the sense of that famous verse from the *Mahābhārata*: "That which sustains, that which keeps the peoples united together, is *dharma*" (*Kaṣṇa-parva*, LXXIX.59).

All this is of enormous significance, and the fact of underestimating it created useless conflicts and suspicions. We emphasize this in order to stress that the orthodox conception of Hinduism does not refer to an idea, but to a living reality. Hinduism does not belong to the realm of essences, but to the sphere of existences. I would add also that a kind of *metanoia* is needed, a sort of "conversion" and "repentance," if we are to understand what *sanātana-dharma* claims its true nature to be. Here again, to introduce our subject, an impartial phenomenological analysis will prove to be extremely useful.

From an existential point of view, Hinduism considers itself as being not so much "true" as "truth." Only in later times did Hinduism finally admit that the truth is incorporated in certain propositions or books or essential attitudes; fundamentally, however, Hinduism represents only the existential path of the individual and, consequently, is a personal and inexpressible matter. Yet we cannot dwell too long on the purely existential sphere; we also have to use concepts to express existential realities. On the other hand, our concepts are never chemically pure, but imbued with the sediments of thousands of years of culture.

This leads to two possible sources of misunderstanding. First of all, we must be aware that we are moving from the existential field into the realm of essential concepts, and second, we must never forget that the meaning of these concepts tends to be tinged with our different cultural environments. This is another factor that suggests the need for the "conversion" we mentioned earlier, which alone can help us understand what Hinduism really means.

Hinduism aims to be truth and truth only. If something is declared as being truth and has not yet been incorporated into Hinduism (intended as a way of life), the latter will accept it without a moment's hesitation. We will look at a few examples later.

How can a member of any tribe have an idea of God or receive salvation if not through some form of animistic behavior or idol worship? And so, consequently, we find that Hinduism means idolatry. But how can someone who is spiritually evolved fail to discover that all the outward appearances of things are merely symbols of deeper realities, and that, ultimately, the Absolute lies above and beyond all names and all forms? Thus, at the same time, Hinduism also means belief in the absolute *nirguṇa-brahman*, a purely transcendent divinity without personal attributes. We are not referring here to any sort of eclectic attitude; on the contrary, we are attempting to describe an actual existential position. This, incidentally, explains why Hinduism is so tolerant with regard to essence but so intolerant from an existential point of view.

We may be excused, therefore, if we do not study any particular Hindū doctrine or describe the forms of worship of this or that school. These forms are certainly all very different and very interesting, but we prefer here to focus our study on the central core of Hinduism.

It is very enlightening to note that phenomenology may describe the nature of Hinduism both in Hindū terms and using other terminologies, for example, Christian. Hinduism is simply *dharma*; it professes to be the existential coefficient of each individual with respect to his *karman*, the ontic place of each member of the Mystic Body in the growth toward the fullness of his being. Whether Hinduism *is* in fact truly what it professes to be and whether it is indeed capable of completely fulfilling its mission is altogether another question, which lies well beyond the scope of phenomenology.

Spirituality

Our purpose here is not to define "religion," but rather to describe a particular religious attitude that we will call "spirituality."

We will move, therefore, from the ontological, objective sphere of religion to the anthropological and merely subjective realm of spirituality, and attempt to detail several basic modalities, indisputable values, and fundamental presuppositions of the Hindū religious attitude. This description is by no means exhaustive, but has the purpose of pointing out certain basic characteristics. Our task, in fact, is not to describe religion or religious values but to define the Hindū religious attitude toward religion. Some of the characteristics outlined here can be found in India in other religions also, such as Islam and Christianity, since certain levels of the Indic soul itself are here involved. This, however, lies outside our main interest.

Today

Our study will be limited, moreover, to the setting of contemporary history, since we are not dealing with ancient times but the situation of the present-day generation. Frequently, in works by experts on Hinduism, distinction is made between classical and fully evolved Hinduism

(that which is found in the sacred writings and in small, qualified minorities) and the Hinduism practiced by the people. This distinction implies an a prioristic conception of high Hinduism and folk Hinduism, which, however true it may be from a philosophical point of view, is in itself based on phenomenological grounds that are totally irrelevant. A similar distinction can be seen between the *pandits* and the "people," but here again, we are not permitted to suggest that one form is nobler than the other, or that the former refers to genuine Hinduism and the latter to a primitive religion that has not yet been fully absorbed by the higher form.

It is obvious that the present cannot be understood without sufficient knowledge of the past. At the same time, however, history is not of prime importance in a phenomenological study.

Hindū Society

In order to increase the certainty coefficient of our descriptions we must distinguish certain homogeneous groups within the circle of Hinduism. If we were to make a *philosophical* analysis of the religion, the most appropriate division would be that of the different religious cults, systems, and schools. A *historical* study would focus on the twofold division of regions and castes, but a *phenomenological* analysis would, I believe, work best by applying the following simple schema.

In India today there are three categories of people:

1. Those who have had a secondary education and, even more specifically, those who have completed university and college studies. I like to call this category (with a hint of irony but without the slightest ill will or disrespect) the "caste of the literati."

2. Those who have received a classic orthodox Hindū training in the *āśramas* and the *mathas*, in the family context and in other similar institutions, whether they have been given the "benefits" of a secular education or not. We may call this the "caste of the orthodox," using the term "orthodox" (for want of a better expression) in its generally accepted, modern-day meaning, even though, due to the many other connotations it involves, it can only be applied to Hinduism in a very relative sense.

3. Those who have not received any type of systematic education, that is, "the people."

We examine each of these groups separately.

Intrinsic Limitations of This Study

At this point a few introductory lines are necessary if we are to evaluate accurately the considerations that follow.

- We are not speaking about the Indic culture in general. To describe it thoroughly we would have to examine many other cultural values; our intentions are far more modest.

- Our phenomenological analysis is of dual relativity; that is, it is never absolute, either when it attempts to characterize the group it refers to, or when it is simply considered in itself. In other words, the characteristics of each group do not belong exclusively but only predominantly to the group itself. A university student, for example, also belongs to a given Hindū cult, a family, and a particular caste, and ultimately descends from the "people" of India. From an individual point of view, however, that student may be described much more accurately on the basis of other characteristics than the values of the group to which he or she belongs. Second, each individual aspect cannot be taken as being inseparable from the group it belongs to, nor can it be regarded in itself as an absolute. Only the full picture, therefore, can give us the exact evaluation of a specific milieu.

• It goes without saying that phenomenology does not draw conclusions or assume responsibility. If, for example, we were to make certain remarks about university students that may sound negative, it does not mean that these remarks, taken in their entirety—that is, integrated with the whole Man—cannot have positive effects, nor that the same students or teaching systems are directly responsible for this state of affairs.

The Literati

In India today there are fifty-five universities, three of which date back over a century (1857). There are also at least forty-two other institutions of a technical and scientific character. In 1947 the number of university students amounted to approximately 230,000 (or 183,000, according to other statistics); in 1956 the number rose to 720,000, and in 1964 to 1.3 million—an average of 0.3 percent of the total population. Needless to say, this minority represents the ruling group, and at least for the time being, the country's destiny is in their hands.

The caste system—or, rather, the caste mentality—is, fortunately or unfortunately (I would not dare to give a hurried opinion on this subject) so deeply rooted in India that this group seems to take on the same characteristics of a caste. It undoubtedly forms a “class” that is separate from the others; this is the class of the “educated.” And for this very reason, this class is more homogeneous than in any other country.

Displacement

A good number of university professors and students are subject to a certain type of displacement which, at the risk of making a caricature of it, we will describe in its extreme form.

This type of person, whether professor or student, is a *déraciné*, having been brusquely separated from traditional Indic life; they have no history behind them and have been unable to identify themselves, despite their outer integration, with the new (Western?) culture they have adopted. This culture, in fact, is “learned from books” rather than being recreated or personally discovered. They are “indoctrinated” people, and though they preserve in their hearts the sacred fire of their ancestors, they are ashamed of such sentiments and strive to eradicate all the lingering alleged superstitions and, along with them, all those deplorable (or supposedly so) customs that are responsible for India having been for centuries a dominated and subjugated nation. They have broken with the past, that real past that gravitates toward modern-day Indic life, even though they do feel a certain amount of pride when they think about this past, about the ancient days of Indic greatness. To them, all this past is now part of a utopian realm, useful perhaps as a symbol of poetry and art, but today completely inadequate as a real factor for shaping the present. Just like those students who, having been educated—with no real feeling of involvement or genuine interest—in a religiously over-saturated atmosphere, eventually come to the point where they feel they have “had enough” religion to last them a lifetime, our typical Man considers that India has borne more than its fair share of religious “inflation” in the past and that, consequently, it should no longer be concerned with religion but rather attend to all the other urgent duties that the present day demands of it.

This man, however (and this may be what will save him!), is frivolous, that is, banal, superficial, and devoid of real interest, or more accurately, any real religious consecration, preferring to define his position as being totally free from any sort of religious fanaticism in his studies and his occupations. Why, in fact, should he nurture such passion for the religious

issues? He is certainly not striving to eradicate his blind beliefs in the supernatural only to fall prey to another faith!

He therefore moves in a kind of "no man's land." He does not and cannot belong to the West, nor could he even imagine the theological roots of that culture he is struggling to absorb. He is unwilling (very often, in fact, it is a question of an act of will) to be assimilated by the past, which is now gone and should also be dead. In his better moments he strives to look to the future, but generally he waits. He is in stand-by mode.

Consequently, religion is, at best, a private matter. If individually he still feels the need to partake in prayer or the desire to belong to a religious group, he may do so. He may even draw some comfort from all this, but in the context of the building of a new society it is merely an inconsistent, and possibly even harmful, factor.

New Idolatry

The old Hindū religion might yet be of some use to the uneducated masses, but it still must be supported by the modern values of the new world: *democracy* and *science*. The meaning of "democracy" to these "educated" people is very simple. It does not have the same connotation it has in the West: a certain social structure born of the collapse of other forms of organization, and so on. It simply means "justice." Religion may be good, it may be more or less necessary, but it has always tolerated (to say the least) a social order that makes the triumph of justice unfeasible. The problem of God and the Gods, therefore, is not only irrelevant but completely secondary compared to the absolute problem of justice, which is today identified with democracy. The purpose of religion used to be to bring Man into contact with the Absolute; today, however, this Absolute has been replaced by a new idol named Democracy, which is contaminated, to varying degrees, by nationalism and other values. Democracy cannot even be questioned; it is absolute.

In the past, religion claimed to provide the answer to the basic problems of Man on this earth; today the new altar for the salvation of mankind is science. Even those who, for various reasons, continue to hold onto the ancient faith or traditional practices justify themselves by saying that such practices are perfectly scientific and have a proven scientific foundation.

It is not completely accurate, however, to say that science is a new idol or a new God, since science has no desire whatsoever to be such. Yet it behaves, or will end up behaving, in the same way as religion has always tried to behave—and this is how the new faith comes into being. Science is not a new religion, to be sure, but the *true* value replacing that which religion represented in the past.

The Indic mentality is wise enough not to be revolutionary. It is not a question of combating religion or heaping discredit on it, but of patiently and effectively replacing it. The old superstitions will only die off when they are replaced by a scientific view of life. Science thus becomes almost synonymous with all that is positive and can take on the meaning both of hygiene and of reason. It is not rare, in fact, to read in advertisements for the most common everyday products such expressions as "scientifically packaged."

Criticism

Blind faith has been eliminated, but the new idols have not yet achieved the steadfastness and stability of the old. Today the minds of university students in India are open to a form of impartial criticism—or, to put it another way, are slightly contaminated with skepticism. The science that comes from the West brings with it a heavy burden of negative values: mate-

rialism, imperialism, mental illness, and so on. The new idol is still carried in procession, but it has not yet been enthroned in its niche.

When applied to religion, this mental attitude produces a degree of skepticism, which results in a passive approach; in other words, it follows the path of least resistance.

Even those who claim to be atheists (more for the fact that they do not believe in the Gods than out of an actual denial of the existence of God) do not completely reject religion; they are simply expressing their wariness about accepting it *en bloc* just as it has been handed down to them. In doing so they manifest a critical attitude, but would in fact be willing to discuss the expedience of religion provided it is purified and "scientific." This possible new religion, moreover, should be purely spiritual (as opposed to the excessively incarnate forms of Hindū religiosity) and also completely individualistic (an attribute representing a reaction against the principle of community that characterizes most Hindū schools). They are tired of *religions*, but they would not condemn *religion* in itself, if they could only succeed in finding (or founding) one.

Sometimes this critical position leads them to consider religion from a certain distance and from the outside and, consequently, to voice the conviction that religion is a good, or at least tolerable, thing for those who have not yet reached the higher condition of science or a higher form of spirituality—that is, without earthly forms, ties, and passions. In other words, religion can only find its place either in an initial stage of human development or on the higher plane of pure sacrifice. These people regard this as equally unimportant, anyway: they already "know" all about it. Religion is not so much the "opium" as the "food," the spiritual nourishment, of the people—though it would be sensible to aim for a more substantial diet.

They do not exclude religion from their discussions and even go so far as to express sincere respect for it, even though, ultimately, it is not "their thing." This, generally speaking, is why the present generation does not pray. Prayer is regarded as a kind of inhibition or as an easy but useless consolation. There are dams to protect against flooding, lightning conductors against storms, and medicines against disease, and all these things are more useful than every possible *mantra*. The other well-known form of prayer, meditation, is regarded with contempt, almost as a waste of time or merely as a technique for developing one's inward powers. Knowledge and science, in fact, prove to be much more efficient and easier to obtain.

This critical attitude tends, more or less consciously, toward a higher synthesis between East and West, old and new, village and city, past and future. There is a general awareness that things are moving, that something has to be done, and this also involves a degree of open-mindedness, a certain "nondogmatic" attitude that is no longer limited to repeating the old formulas and, at the same time, recognizes the relative nature of the new acquisitions.

The Religious Attitude

I once asked a student—I purposely chose a student of literature and not science—if he intended to take part in a large folk festival in honor of Siva. He had not even thought about it, he said, and immediately, almost as if to justify himself or to clarify his view, added, "*Abam Siva*" (I am Siva!). There was no need, in other words, for any external worship. The attitude of the majority of this group could be summed up as follows:

- ◊ *Indifference*, or lack of interest in the folk forms of Hinduism and equally toward all cultural forms and every kind of active, organized religion.
- ◊ *Respect* for the same forms, to the extent of vehemently defending them if foreigners and non-Hindus attack or try to ridicule them.

• *Tolerance*, or a sort of resignation to the idea of having to continue these religious practices once they return home or settle down (if only out of respect for their women and their parents and, later, their children).

The fact that the modern-day university students—in clear contrast with the old type of *brahmachārya*—must go through a period of irreligiosity during their studies is considered normal, almost as a natural stage and part of their evolutionary process. After all, a student receives secular education only, so a secular attitude is clearly more fitting during this period.

The “Orthodox”

It is difficult to provide accurate data regarding the number of members of religious institutions existing today in India. The schools, however, teaching the sacred doctrines of Hinduism, in one form or another, can be counted in their thousands. If we assume that in every ten villages there is at least one *matha* or one *āśrama* in which disciples are taught, we will easily reach the number of seventy thousand bulwarks of orthodoxy. There are also around 7.5 million “holy men” (*sādhus*) who roam around the country in search of perfection and food; their presence alone serves, if nothing else, as a reminder that Hinduism is by no means a thing of the past. It is true that not all these men (and, in part, also women) who wear the saffron-colored robe fully meet the demands of holiness and unworldliness that their robe proclaims and not all are truly initiated into Hinduism, yet many of them have a profound knowledge of the particular school to which they belong. Conscious orthodoxy, in actual fact, is not an exclusive heritage of the third and fourth stages of Hindū spirituality. Many heads of families—that is, many men and women living in the state of matrimony within the society—admirably represent traditional Hinduism. It is on this class of enlightened and conscious orthodoxy we will focus now. The others belong to our third group.

Crisis

Not only is the Hindū orthodox intelligentsia aware that Hinduism is going through a crisis, but it is involved itself in this crisis, in the deepest and broadest sense of the word. Crisis, in fact, does not mean simply unrest; much less does it imply decadence, degradation, or disorientation. Crisis means that particular crucial turning point in the life of a given group or society that finds itself having to choose between different paths—the choice depending on the decision, the power of judgment, and the discriminating capacity of the person or of the group undergoing the crisis.

While the two types of crisis are closely connected, we will put aside the crisis of Hinduism in general and describe only the specific crisis affecting the followers of traditional Hinduism. According to this group, Hinduism has survived every kind of attack, from whatever side it came, and has succeeded in overcoming even greater dangers than those of the present day. Hinduism has, therefore, nothing to fear. True, the process is now penetrating the minds and hearts of its best members, but this does not mean that Hinduism will change; it will effectively adapt to the new demands, as it has always done. It may also be that, ultimately, this is all part of a cosmic process in which Man is merely a tool with no freedom of his own, but the fact nevertheless remains that (they believe) the process has developed within and thanks to the attitude of an enlightened minority.

This orthodox group is aware that Hinduism must accept the modern-day challenge if it is to be purified and spiritually enriched. However, regarding what is eternal in Hinduism

and what is conditioned by time, what must be purified and changed and what must be preserved at all costs, it has not yet reached unanimity of views.

One current of thought is in favor of keeping everything as it was in ancient times, and they subject the modern conceptions of Man and society to sharp criticism. Ultimately, those who support this current of thought are maximalists.

Another school of thought claims that the essence of Hinduism consists in a handful of principles, which they strive to adapt not only to a new type of society but also to a new religious consciousness.

Between these two currents, of course, are an endless range of opinions and shades.

Science versus Faith

One of the most common features characterizing this reaction of orthodoxy, along with the new vitality of Hinduism and the abandoning of the armed battle between science and faith, is the enormous effort to find a harmonious way out. The Europe of the past two centuries is well acquainted with this drama, but its experience is very scarcely applied in India. We are looking at the case of a parallel cultural movement emerging from a similar dialectical situation. We said earlier that Hinduism nurtures a certain universal aspiration to become scientific, without, however, having a clear idea of what this might mean. The problem occurs when we try to give substance to this almost magical word. On the whole, we may say that "science," in this context, means "reason." There is, however, a considerable difference between the ideal of a "reasonable" Hinduism and that of "rational" Hinduism.

On this point a very interesting process is developing. Summing up a quantity of dialectical tensions and grounds for thought, we might attempt to present it in the following terms.

On one hand, on the Indian cultural scene, "faith" is disappearing and giving way to "science." What the people call "pure faith" is stigmatized as superstition and blind belief. Education is very often regarded as the true path that leads to a scientific vision of life and replaces a blind and naive routine. Medicine is not the only example that applies; biological and physical sciences and philosophy itself may also be included in this schema. Everything in life—our habits, our way of living, our ideas, even our religion—must be "reasonable" at the very least, if not "rational."

Hinduism does not shun reason; in fact, it welcomes science. The purification of Hinduism that we mentioned earlier, and also its development, at least as far as this "historical" concept can legitimately be applied to them, is closely connected with the favorable acceptance of science and the adoption by the Hindū people of this scientific attitude. Hinduism seeks to resolve the conflict between faith and reason by pointing out that it is merely apparent and does not really exist at all, because either faith is a prescientific attitude that gives way to reason, or true faith is simply another name for reason and science. Everything that the ancient Hindū sages wrote to be handed down to future generations was nothing but pure "science," which the world is only now beginning slowly to discover. The classic *śaṃskāras* are thereby justified as hygienic, rational, and scientific.

Authentic faith, then, would be the same as science. This is the first aspect of the antinomy. It very frequently responds to the desire to rationalize everything, and this brings about an actual destruction of faith. Either faith is real (they claim), and then it is science, or it is a blind belief and therefore must be replaced by science. It would be extremely "unscientific" to recognize some "supernatural" sphere within which faith can move freely, outside the control of reason. We would find ourselves faced with a superstition or a totally unfounded and "dogmatic" faith beyond all proof and justification.

It would be wrong, however, to think of Hinduism as a kind of "naturalism"; indeed, the opposite is true. And this is the other aspect of antinomy. The first, as we have seen, consisted in reducing "faith" and "science" to the same level. Here, however, science is raised to the height of faith. From this point of view, science is developing into a faith, if not actually a form of religion. Thanks to its unconscious power of assimilation, Hinduism is very slowly absorbing (and probably also transforming) science. Reason is not the enemy of God; reason is God. Science does not destroy religion; science is religion. And, in actual fact, the integralistic attitude toward science is a religious attitude.

Science is a part of the ancient *jñāna*, if not actually identified with it. True, science is a pure knowledge; it is not a secularized knowledge, however, but rather wisdom that saves, that gives freedom here on earth and in the afterlife. The conflict in the West has taken on a different form due to the fact that Christianity claims to belong to a supernatural sphere, and the Christian faith, on its part, is a higher form of knowledge that cannot be reduced to reason, though it is not in contradiction with it. This is not the case with Hinduism, which believes it has nothing to lose by becoming "scientific." Science and reason are not subordinated to higher forms of knowledge, as they themselves are the highest expressions of human life and religion. Whether this type of science is the same that was imported from the West or whether "reason" operates exclusively on the basis of the principle of noncontradiction are two questions that are undoubtedly related, but nevertheless different. This, however, would bring us out of the sphere of phenomenology.

Thirst for Oneness

Despite its richness and variety, throughout the centuries the Indian mentality has always been a monolithic monument of oneness. It is deeply significant that the column of Aśoka is the symbol of the Indian culture—and on this column we could inscribe the sentence by St. Thomas Aquinas: "A thing is intelligible insofar as it is one. Whoever does not understand unity does not understand anything" (*De Veritate* q.21, a.3). Modern-day orthodoxy is no exception to this saying. And such a heartfelt desire for oneness is, in fact, characteristic of the contemporary traditional Hindū mentality.

However immense the variety of Hindū religious forms and schools may be, the basis underlying oneness is kept constantly in mind, by being discovered or even created anew, if necessary. A Hindū *pandit* will always tend to emphasize oneness rather than multiplicity. Hinduism is considered unitary since animism, polytheism, deism, theism, absolutism, even atheism and, likewise, any other pure spirituality of action, love, and knowledge are regarded as multiform manifestations of one single religion, one single truth. A learned Hindū may judge the followers of another school as being in some way prey to misguidance, but this does not mean he will attempt to "standardize" Hinduism. He believes, in fact, that such oneness already exists.

The same attitude applies to the other religions. They are regarded as separate paths leading to the same goal, like different rivers that converge in the same sea. This "catholicity" is so beloved to Hinduism that, if it must criticize other religions, it criticizes their unwillingness to acknowledge its point of view; it is intolerant toward the lack of tolerance of other creeds.

However we may judge such a position, this attitude (which tends to harmonize, and for this very reason has an air of eclecticism and syncretism) only demonstrates a vivid desire for synthesis and a sincere aspiration to oneness. In order to understand all this we must go back to what we said in the Introduction regarding the existential condition that is peculiar to the Indian spirit, which, while inclined to believe that all forms of Hinduism

and all religions are equally valid, obviously does not go as far as to say that this equality exists also in the formulation of the specific doctrines and the different ideas. Likeness and equality lie on a much more profound plane than that on which the various religions are normally compared. At this point the rivers *are* different; only the sea is one and the same, and the functions that the rivers fulfill are identical: carrying water from the earth to the ocean. To make a comparison, Christianity would accept the initial metaphor, but it would point out that sometimes the rivers do not reach the sea but converge into other rivers, that they often carry other things besides water, and that certain rivers even evaporate along the way. Nevertheless, as long as they remain true rivers they all carry the same Christian water that flows into the eternal sea. But here we are overstepping the limits of phenomenology.

The Religious Attitude

I once asked a very learned and devout *pandit*, "Do you not fear that Hinduism will have to undergo great transformation and crisis in our time?" to which he basically replied that he neither thought nor feared that this would happen. We might sum up the mentality of this group as follows.

Optimism: the conviction that Hinduism will survive and continue to flourish. This conviction, however, rests not only on faith in the perennity of the religion but also on historical experience itself, which appears to corroborate it. Consequently, orthodoxy is not concerned with such problems and shows very little interest in them. They ultimately appear as something rather strange, artificial, maybe even "too Western."

Scientific faith. There is no need to fear—they say—because our faith is not a blind belief but is built on rational foundations that science is right now discovering. We must not be ashamed of our faith, and we must overcome the inferiority complex that has developed within us through centuries of foreign rule. Our faith, in fact, has foreseen exactly what science is now achieving. Not only our astrology but also our ritual and our customs are perfectly scientific. Whatever is not scientific is not genuine Hinduism, and any nonscientific elements existing within it will be eliminated.

Conciliatory attitude. We absolutely believe—they add—that Hinduism, correctly understood, is superior to any other form of religion because it is more subtle and more universal in its doctrines, but this does not mean that we condemn other religions or other forms of worship, and not only are we disposed toward peaceful coexistence but we are also willing to establish relationships of sincere brotherhood. There are many kinds of people, and Hinduism does not lay claim to any monopoly.

The People

India has more than 550,000 villages, and over 80 percent of the entire population lives in them. We are talking, therefore, about an impressive mass of approximately 400 million people, 90 percent of whom are illiterate (82 percent of the Indian population cannot read or write). This does not mean, however, that this population is ignorant in the strict sense of the word, or that it does not have a refined, profound culture, because India also has a nonwritten, that is, oral, tradition. Besides this, the people are well versed in the art of speaking and listening. We will not deal here with folk worship in all its immensity, nor with its picturesque festivals, its moving pilgrimages, nor its more sordid practices for that matter, but only the religious and anthropological attitude of the people.

Regarding such, the first distinction to be made is that between men and women. Man is man from the very beginning and endeavors, therefore, to embody a series of masculine values. Woman is woman, and not only are her law code and her behavior feminine, but the purpose she has set herself in life and the values she pursues passionately are also equally feminine. There exists almost no human value, in fact, that is undifferentiated; it is either masculine or feminine. This distinction is also accepted by the class of the literati. Just recently, in Delhi, the government denied a certain medical institute the right to continue to accept women only, but a little more than one year later this decision was abrogated. From a psychological point of view, some very interesting conclusions might be drawn from the discussions that followed. What is involved, in fact, is the struggle between deep human instinct, which is still firmly rooted in India, and modern "reason," which, like "humanity," "science," and "democracy," is neither masculine nor feminine. The *values* of the modern-day culture are either so high and disembodied or so low and material as to lie above or below the differences between men and women.

The following three values, therefore, might be divided according to a masculine or a feminine viewpoint. They have, in fact, both a masculine and a feminine side, but (for the sake of brevity and to avoid the risk of misunderstandings in the absence of long introductory explanations) rather than dwelling on such distinctions, we will continue with our description in "hermaphroditic" terms. Anyway, the reader may easily imagine the twofold perspective of the picture.

Earthbound Behavior

There is almost an implicit contradiction in speaking of chthonian values (from the Greek *χθονιος*, "linked to the earth"); they are, in fact, rooted in the unconscious, and as soon as they rise to the level of consciousness, they dissolve like an old, yellowed photograph. We can only attempt to describe something of what happens in the deepest layers of the soul and try to understand it by going back to the roots of our own nature. Fortunately, the true possessors of these values are not able to read this essay and so their direct attitude to life and their innocence will not be troubled in the slightest. Human reflection, in fact, is a double-edged sword.

The primary and most impressive value that is most widespread among the people of India (and not only India) is the earthbound value. I explain this immediately.

There is a sober and naked way of accepting life, just as it *is*, as it appears *on earth* and not as it could or should be or as it will be (if we think and behave morally in a certain way or we strive and work toward transforming our human existence). Existence is *here*; human life is here and only here. It has been given to us, and we, in turn, give it to others, and after a certain period of time we are forced to give it up. This existence, then, should not be regarded first and foremost as an object of reflection, nor should it be enriched by culture and other values (which are, after all, purely accidental), but it must be lived, simply *ex-isted*, unfolded in hope, fear, love, suffering, faith, and anguish. Certainly, the risk of falling prey to negative resignation or pure passivity is all too great. Rather than attempting here to discuss the dangers or possible abuses of a way of thinking, however, we will limit ourselves to describing a certain situation and revealing in the same attitude we are exposing a value that is extraordinarily positive and of prime importance.

The human being lives on this earth as a flower, as the sea or the sky. The purpose of creation—or, to avoid using this term, the meaning of the world—does not lie in the fact that I can know the meaning, but in the very fact of its existence. If the world has a meaning, this

meaning does not come from the knowledge I have of the world (this may be very interesting and also very important, but only to me), but from the *world itself*. The meaning of the world is the world itself and not my knowledge of this meaning. It may be (as indeed it is) better for me to know this meaning, but it is not at all essential, just as it is not necessary for a bird to know the meaning of its life in order for this meaning to be full. It is true, of course, that Man is an intelligent being and that, consequently, his very existence requires a certain degree of intellectual awareness, but this awareness does not need to be of the reflective type. And we should also remember that the knowledge of good and evil has one single origin and all sciences come from the same tree. (The present-day "theological" discussions in the West about the fate of children who die without being baptized might perhaps draw enlightening conclusions from this thought.)

Quaestio mihi factus sum, "I have become a question to myself," said the first "Western" man (though, in actual fact, he was an African).³ The Indic people, on the other hand, do not ask themselves this question. "The rose has no why," a medieval Christian mystic wrote.⁴ The rose simply exists, and all the reasons our mind may discover are never either final or fundamental; they cannot explain the rose, let alone make it flower. They merely offer some explanations regarding the many "hows," while leaving the "why" intact. All existence is irreducible. This is truly the deep *unconscious* value (we can only call it such, since it is clearly not knowledge, neither can it be expressed in terms of experience or even awareness) that belongs to the people of India.

That life is a gift we are given without being asked, and that our existence takes place down here on this earth, is a fundamental assumption we all accept as true—and, ultimately, this is more important than anything else. Pure existence, in fact, is a value that precedes all the "hows" and all the ornaments of culture and civilization.

It has often been observed that the Indian does not appreciate Nature, nor even perceive the beauty of its message. The more profound explanation for this behavior lies in what we said a little earlier. The Indian does not have this sense of Nature because he does not need it; he himself, in fact, is Nature and part of Nature. He lacks, we might say, the necessary distance or height for contemplating Nature from the outside, from an external viewpoint. Man is one of the things of the cosmos. He is not a foreigner, or a tourist, or a visitor in this world; neither is he the lord and master of creation. He is part of it; he is a fragment of this cosmos and belongs to Nature in the same way as the forests, the animals, and the rivers do.

His religion is a cosmic religion, and his life is a chthonian life. Ultimately, his actions are not motivated by his ideas nor even by his human instincts, but by telluric forces, by the rhythm of the Earth, the dynamism of the whole universe, within the framework of which he simply lives his part. It used to shock me when I would read, printed in European newspapers in large print, news about two or three fatal accidents in some Western country and just a very small article on the death of hundreds, sometimes thousands of people killed by some natural disaster in the East. This attitude on the part of the newspapers is, of course, not intentional, being based rather on practical considerations, yet in India one has the impression that such a way of seeing and portraying things contains implicit indications of a real situation. The "earthbound" humanity of the East can afford, just like the Nature to which it belongs, to bear the loss of many human lives, and to consider untimely death as a pilgrim who, finding a ride, reaches his destination much faster. The true meaning of life, the only

³ St. Augustine, bishop of the town of Hippo in Numidia, currently Algeria.

⁴ Angelus Silesius.

thing that is really important, is having lived, so life cannot be considered a failure even if no deed worthy of external praise is ever accomplished.

Earthbound behavior also means taking a direct position with regard to the main problems of life. There is such a thing as knowledge of the meaning of things, of course, but there is no such thing as reflection on the meaning of the meaning; there is no crisis of faith in the Christian sense of the word, nor reflection on the possibility of change regarding fundamental things. Just as physical cancer is a "modern" disease, so rational cancer is unknown among "nonmodern" people. If life has a purpose, then it simply has a purpose, and I do not have any pressing need to torment myself with questions of what it may be.

Yet here we are also reflecting too deeply on something that is much simpler than all our discussions.

The chthonian value lies in the unconscious. According to Indic philosophy, the state of dreamless sleep is the highest of all because, at that moment, we simply *exist*, without being disturbed by doing this or thinking that. This, in fact, is how the people of India live their naked life and "exist."

Religion, consequently, is neither an act of reflection nor the fruit of a conscious decision, but the spontaneous flourishing of a chthonian existence. The fundamental core of religion is not composed of the appeals of the intellect, or the approval that ethics demands of the will, but of the prior consecration of our whole being to the One who *is* (though He may take on many forms) and the complete acceptance of our ontic situation (how we are). More precisely, religion consists in accepting our contingency (our "creaturality"), our dependence, in recognizing the One (or the Being) on whom we depend.

Man is religious not *primarily* because he discovers or accepts this relationship with God (whatever content we may ascribe to this concept) but because of the reality or foundation based on which this type of awareness is possible, that is, insofar as Man is in fact and truly "closely united" with God. This means that the first element of religion is not consciousness, but being, existing, contingency. The dependence of human beings on God has something in common with that of the animals, plants, and the earth: it is a cosmic bond with the Cause, the Beginning, and the Source of the cosmos itself. If we are not able to understand this dimension of the religious attitude of the people of India (and that of other peoples also), we will end up by altering its meaning completely, and we will behave unfairly toward the religions of this country.

The Sense of the Sacred

Much more visible and far easier to explain, meanwhile, is the all-pervading sense of the Sacred. The "liberal" division between the sacred and the profane does not exist in India, for the simple reason that there is no place for an autonomous profane reality. Everything is sacred; every action has reverberations both above and beyond its autonomous sphere. The whole world is merely a symbol and a shadow of a higher reality. There is nothing that is without importance. Every mistake, every misdeed is a kind of sacrilege. Strictly speaking, the sense of sin is almost nonexistent in India, but the sense of sacrilege is everywhere.

Not only is life sacred, but every being and every action is magically, almost sacramentally effective. Ask any doctor or medical student who works in a hospital in India if they will ever succeed in convincing a peasant, especially a female peasant, of the *autonomous* effectiveness of the medicine they use. Penicillin and quinine may well be remedies, but the general feeling is that they heal not because of their chemical composition or their inherent properties (after all, why on earth should sulphamidic compounds have exactly that effect?), but thanks to the

divinity that governs every plant and every medicine, and the spiritual power of the person who uses such remedies. The medieval concept of *vis* is still a living spirit in India.

Therefore, if religion breathes within the sphere of the Sacred and if everything is sacred, then religion is present everywhere. It is not just an occupation limited to a few hours a day; it is not a private matter concerning the individual, and it is not practiced exclusively by the elderly. Religion pervades all human activities, and the whole world has a religious dimension that shows us the true face of the universe.

Obviously, there is always a danger of falling prey to superstition and credulity, but very often religious historians and philosophers have forgotten to emphasize the profound capacity for observing the world and the nature of things that this kind of attitude involves.

This sense of the Sacred—understood as a universal attitude for the very reason that it does not oppose a profane sphere and cannot be *de-fined* through nothing, since nothing exists outside of it—produces a totally peculiar consequence that has confounded more than a few scholars. If everything is sacred, then not only does this sacred character have quite blurred contours, but it also becomes somehow familiar, natural, and almost normal. The *mysterium tremendum* and the *numinosum* are tempered by the *proximum* and *cotidianum* side of the *numen*. It is not that the fear and the awe disappear, but if you happen to believe in evil spirits and you see and hear them every day and you know that the headache you have suffered for the past ten years is caused by one of them, then although you will continue to be wary, you will not fear them quite so much.

There is also another consequence that is of some interest to our subject. We might call it “experience,” or define it as the attitude or the subconscious perception of transcendence in Man and of immanence in the Divine. In other words, the Indian people believe, feel, or show that they possess a certain cognition of God as a transcendent Being, experiencing Him in terms of immanence, and manifest the same exact behavior toward Man, who, though he is a contingent being, is perceived in terms of transcendence. When the Indian people speak or think about God, they tend to emphasize His immanence because they have, more or less consciously, already taken for granted the truth of His transcendence. On the other hand, when they refer to Man they tend to accentuate his transcendence, because they do not even imagine that there can be any doubt about his immanence.

This position might be defined paradoxically as follows: you pronounce the word “Man” and they instinctively feel that Man is something more than a “man,” than a living being, pure and simple. Man is part of God, Man is in some way divine, Man is somehow eternal. . . . You say “Man,” and they think God! Vice versa, you say “God,” and they automatically feel that God is also less than God, that God is also an *avatāra*, or that God is *also* you or is at least in you, that God is in some way human. The danger of pantheism is literally within reach, but the attitude in itself and of itself cannot be called pantheistic. Ultimately, it is a wonderfully profound *theandric* position (although it is not the task of a phenomenological study to develop the Christian values that are implicit in this particular position).

Hierarchy

Let us bear in mind that the abuse or misuse of a value only demonstrates the actual existence of such a value. Where faith is present, there is also the danger of credulity, and where there is a strong sense of hierarchy, there is also the risk of exploitation and unfair privileges.

If you visit an Indian village and pay attention to how life is lived there (being careful not to cause any disturbance by your presence), you will notice that everything is organized

like in a monastery. Not only are there castes and subcastes, according to which it is not even conceivable for an individual to belong to himself, but there is also a hierarchy for everything. There are those who must be greeted first and with a special type of greeting: those who may call a woman by her own name and those who must use her husband's name; those who must eat first, or second, or third; those who may do this or that type of work; and so on. When you meet someone, it is not a casual meeting between two individuals, but the convergence of two hierarchical worlds. The nakedness of human existence that we talked about earlier is tempered by this dimension, and is embraced and clothed by all the possible values of history, culture, and the personality, in each of which the entire human being is reflected.

Man is not an isolated individual; he is part of the society in which he lives, by virtue of the blood ties, origins, position, social rank, and so on, that bind him. Ask anyone who he is and you are asking him where he comes from, who his father is, what his caste is, what his level of knowledge or wealth is, and so on. He is part of the Whole, fully integrated with the society to which he belongs. The unknown outsider with no family tree is either an enemy or a god.

This hierarchical sense pervades all life and, consequently, religion also. Modern-day India has made strenuous efforts to make the Hindū temples accessible to members of the different social classes. In itself this may be something good and necessary, but it has not, at the same time, been welcomed by either the higher or the lower classes. The function of the brahmin, from a theoretical point of view, consists in praying, but the prayer of the *sudra* is his own work. Parity, in fact, is not complete equality; it is a relative concept. It can only mean that I will be judged or held accountable for what I have received in life or what was expected of me. Ultimately, it is a proportional equation. It is not true that everyone has the same duties or that everyone must live by the same law. Beginning from the Laws of Manu, all India's codes and traditions of law have different rules and different punishments for the "same" offenses, depending on which caste the offender belongs to. Actions that appear identical from the outside are substantially quite different. If we were to lose sight of this sense of hierarchy, the entire hierarchical culture of India would appear inhuman and incomprehensible.

Children, wives, husbands, parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and so on, are all subject to different social conditions and must behave according to their own condition. Westerners and modern Hindūs often rebel against the fact that not everyone is allowed to recite certain *mantras* or pray in the same way, seeing in this situation an injustice that deprives part of the population of its rights. This consideration of Hindū society, however, is made from the wrong perspective, and their error is clear. First of all, it is not a question of rights but mainly of duties. It would not be correct, in fact, to say that only the patriarch of a high-caste family and the brahmin of the village have the *right* to do something that others cannot. On the contrary, we should say that they have a *duty* to perform certain actions, and that others do not have these duties but have others. Naturally, every duty implies a right, and vice versa. It is merely a question of emphasis. Second, the fact that some of these duties are difficult and others are light and easy is quite another problem. Again, this is not the place to discuss the abuses of hierarchical privileges or the anachronisms of this type of society.

The worlds of the Gods and that of the spirits also have a hierarchical structure. The law of *karman*, which is probably the most important and most widespread belief in Hinduism, and the so-called transmigration (of souls, or reincarnation) are other expressions of this same sense of hierarchy. A rock cannot immediately enter into union with God because it is incapable of doing so, but this does prevent it from being perfect in itself, as a rock. Likewise, not all human beings can obtain ultimate salvation and must, therefore, be reborn in a better condition than the former. The West does not consider it at all unfair that an animal

has no heavenly life, nor equally do the Indian people regard it as wrong that the *mokṣa* is reserved only for those who, among men, are at the top of the hierarchical ladder. The others, in any case, will always be given a chance in their future lives. No peasant would ever dream of becoming a *rāja*; it does not befit him to be a *rāja*, and so he feels no unhappiness in not being so. Recently the peasants were told that one of them might even become president of India, but they still find it very hard to believe.

The Religious Attitude

A poor man who suffered from leprosy, whose disease had reached a pitifully advanced stage, was offered a bed in an ultra-modern hospital. He appeared extremely reluctant to be hospitalized, however, and his wife was plainly against it. In the hospital, in fact, there were thousands of lepers, while at home she could be alone with him and dedicate herself to him completely. And so they lived, together, in their wretched hovel for eighteen years. This is the people of India! In brief,

- *Total acceptance* of life, just the way it occurs or is given to us. Resignation, passiveness, yielding.
- *Heaven-bound causality*. The entire process of the world, down to the tiniest human action, is conditioned not by what we might call second causes but by forces that are superior to the world, forces that are generally considered as Gods.
- *Distrust* and diffidence toward the modern world, toward everything new and toward a God that is without gods or angels or spirits and is completely transcendent, beyond the material world.

Epilogue

Some of the characteristics we have described above may seem almost to contradict one another. As we have pointed out, however, rather than mutually excluding each other, they are, in fact, complementary.

Assuming we were able to overlook the many important differences, if we were asked to condense our discussion in a form that may be valid for India today, we might sum it up as follows:

1. *Religion at the forefront*. In one way or another, for better or for worse, in India religion is still at the forefront, and its influence continues to be felt in all manifestations of social and personal life in the country. We cannot do without it.
2. *Evolution of religion*. Whether Hinduism has always been a dynamic phenomenon or not, the fact remains that today the religion or religions of India are moving, going through an evolutionary stage. This evolution (it is not for us to decide whether it is good or bad) has a twofold nature: *adaptation* to the modern conditions of life and *purification* that tends to conform to the primitive model of what genuine Hinduism is considered to be.
3. *Weakening of religion*. Despite all the efforts of its faithful, the Hindū society today is having to deal not so much with the attacks of other religions or the intrinsic weakness created by existing controversies between the various religious groups as with the powerful impact of an a-religious mentality. We might call this a wave of secularism, a movement of desecration, or whatever, but the truth is that—although in the new *awakening* of India,

Hinduism has a unique chance and a great purpose to fulfill (Great India was, in fact, a Hindū India)—today in its *new* awakening Hinduism has been left in the corner, because also the India under foreign rule was a Hindū India and Hinduism is held responsible for the country's subhuman conditions of life.

In conclusion, if the human being has been defined as *Homo religiosus*, we may say, in spite of everything, that today's Hindū is still extraordinarily so, and we may safely declare that his religious attitude still constitutes the fundamental dimension of his being.

DISCOVERING THE FOUNDATION OF THE INDIC PHILOSOPHY FOR A NEW ORIENTATION¹

*Vidimus enim stellam eius in Oriente.*²

—Mt 2:2

The Need for a New Orientation

A priori, it may and must be said that every living philosophy constantly needs new guidelines, and this is for two main reasons. If philosophy is to be something more than a museum piece or a subject of purely archaeological interest, it should always maintain a twofold bond: active and passive, with life and culture. On one hand, philosophy itself, as an integral view of reality, influences and shapes all Man's activities and behavior here on earth, to the extent that every cultural practice invariably has an underlying (and often disregarded) source of philosophical inspiration. On the other hand, human life, with all its implications, is largely responsible for generating and defining the philosophy of a given period, so the philosopher is often a product of his time and only appears to be fully comprehensible when he refers to the actual historical and cultural situation in which he lives, or has lived. Part of the necessity for dialogue within philosophy itself, therefore, is the constant seeking out of a new orientation for philosophical doctrines capable of directing mankind's new historical processes, and the assimilation of new guidelines from culture and human life.

Reasons We Need a New Orientation

A posteriori, it is also clear how urgently Indic philosophy needs a new orientation. Due to obvious historical reasons, Indic philosophy has not managed to effectively assert its presence in the formation of contemporary life in India, nor can we say that the cultural situation of the contemporary world in general, and that of India in particular, has had a very direct influence on Indic philosophy. On the contrary, it is and remains on the whole something tied to the past, a mere adaptation or modern interpretation (if not an actual repetition) of ancient problems and ancient solutions. Evidently, therefore, there is a need for a new orientation.

This does not mean, however, that we must deny the past and become slaves to the new for its own sake. It means that problems that are considered perennial and their respective solutions must not be simply expressed in modern terms but rethought and "reexperienced"

¹ Original text: R. Panikkar, *Maya e Apocalisse. L'incontro dell'induismo e del cristianesimo* (Rome: Abete, 1966), chap. 2.

² "We have seen his star in the Orient," according to the Vulgate.

in the present by and for modern Man, while allowing that the new answer may coalesce perfectly well with traditional solutions.

The “Modern” Tribute

Almost all interpretations, explanations, and even the recent advances in the field of Indic philosophy have been made, perhaps not always in dialogue with “modern” Western philosophy, but certainly in a spirit of acceptance (in one way or another) of the principle and fundamental premises of that philosophy, and this is particularly true in the acceptance of the Western concept of “philosophy.” Even here, where the relative differences could not be denied, Indic philosophers have pointed out all too often how Indic philosophy is also rational, how it qualifies as a “philosophy” according to the “modern” Western idea and is just as “scientific,” and so on. In other words, the structure through which modern Indic philosophy effectively achieves a form of self-reflection—and in the light of which seeks to renew itself or attempts to continue its development—has basically and largely been borrowed from the “modern” Western philosophical tradition.

Therefore, the first new orientation that Indic philosophy must adopt is, in the most literal and etymological meaning of the word, a *reorientation*; it must, that is, turn back to the Orient, the East. The word, therefore, is both a symbol and a challenge. Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Indic cultures alike can find in their own scriptures and traditions a profound meaning to this “facing the East”—and yet the East is not a place where we can be. The East, where the sun rises, lies always beyond the earth.

The End of the “Modern” Age

Nevertheless, this new orientation would be completely misunderstood if it were interpreted as a self-sufficient means (both proud and foolish at the same time) of becoming and remaining deeply withdrawn and detached from the West and the universal tradition of a *philosophia perennis*. On the contrary, however, the reorientation we feel the need for represents a new bond with the philosophical tradition of the world, a new opening up to the fullness of human reality and a deeper understanding of the integral conception of philosophy.

Whatever their inclination, contemporary thinkers almost unanimously recognize that a new era in world history is beginning, that “modern culture” is completing a cycle and that we are witnessing the “end of the modern age.” One of the consequences of this fact is precisely the need to modify and reorient the concept of “philosophy” that has been adopted in the “modern” period.

This is, in fact, the main purpose of these notes, which I will strive to formulate and explain with the greatest possible clarity and concision [**QY: conciseness?**]. It follows directly that the reorientation of Indic philosophy is by no means an exclusively Indic problem or, much less, a simple relationship with the past, but rather a universal philosophical problem, an urgent task of the present, and a grave responsibility for the future.

Philosophy versus Theology

The basic difference between modern Western “philosophy” and the other conception of philosophy might perhaps be defined in several ways: either the modern concept of “philosophy” (as it has generally been accepted in European philosophy from Descartes to Nicolai Hartmann) does not correspond to the meaning traditionally associated with the word

"philosophy," or else (taking the opposite point of view) this common idea of "philosophy," understood as a purely rational inquiry into reality and ultimate reality, is an antiphilosophical conception of philosophy, or again, what the "modern" spirit calls "philosophy" is scientific philosophy, not philosophical. We might, of course, define "philosophy" as the rational knowledge of ultimate reality, but then it would not be correct to identify this kind of "philosophy" with what other cultures have defined as philosophy, nor can we "purge" it of everything that does not perfectly fit with our definition, or claim, without first putting it to the test, that there is no better answer to ultimate questions.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that this limited and specific meaning of "philosophy" does have a positive value in itself and is one of the greatest achievements of the human spirit (and in this lies its great danger)—yet it does not correspond to the traditional conception of philosophy and does not fully express the mission that philosophy has always pursued.

The question this raises, therefore, may be posed as follows: Can we define philosophy based on its *material object*? If so, we will have to conclude that Indic philosophy and Christian theology can both be classed as philosophy. But if, on the other hand, we define philosophy in terms of its *formal object*, then neither of these two disciplines can really be called philosophy. Philosophy would, in this case, be reduced to what the word means in the post-Cartesian cultural world.

The question becomes even more complicated when we try to understand the *relationship* that exists between the two *objects*. To the Christian believer, for example, who is also a philosopher in the limited sense of the term, "philosophy" certainly exists and its existence is justified, but it can never be the ultimate wisdom; it can never, in other words, be placed on the same level as theology (or what Indic philosophy means to a Hindu). However, to a nonbeliever, "philosophy," in the sense referred to above, will represent the ultimate wisdom, and he will claim (and not without reason) that philosophy is by definition ultimate and stands, therefore, on the same level as both Indic philosophy and Christian theology, but he will reject these two disciplines as dogmatic or, at the very least, irrational constructions. It is obvious that if the nonbeliever has no faith in any higher form of knowledge outside of human reason he will not be able to acknowledge anything beyond philosophy, understood as rational effort. In order to meet this challenge, Christian theology has invented the hybrid science known as apologetics, and for the same reason, Indic philosophy has been—and is still—tempted to renounce its suprarational content in order to become a "philosophy." Hence we have the "apologetic" nature of many contemporary works in Indic philosophy (nothing is more "hygienic" than the Hindū *samskāra*, more "reasonable" than intuition, more "logical" than faith, more fashionable than the *vedānta*, and so on).

I would like to dedicate a moment to exhorting Indic philosophy to restore a sense of necessary loyalty toward its tradition and challenge it to resist this temptation (while, however, remaining open to progress and evolution). Here, however, we must concentrate only on the key issue, regarding which three different kinds of considerations may be made.

General Historical Perspective

If we consider the conception of philosophy as it appears in all the cultures of the world (with the exception, perhaps, of the adventure of the European spirit from around the time of Descartes to the present day), we will discover, first of all, that most of these cultures make no distinction between philosophy and theology, and none of them separate the two. In ancient Greece, in the Middle Ages, among the church fathers and in Arabic, Chinese, Jewish, and Indic philosophy, in fact, theology has always been regarded as the queen of all

forms of knowledge and the ultimate wisdom on matters regarding the universe, ourselves, and God, many times calling it philosophy, other times metaphysics, and even contemplation. Whether we choose to call it theology or philosophy, *brahmajñāna* or *darsana*, however, this universal wisdom has always aspired to be comprehensive knowledge, to represent a complete vision of the ultimate problems of reality. Except for the period of European culture referred to above, philosophy has never limited itself to being a unique and purely rational source of knowledge, but has sought rather to embrace and examine closely every possible type and form of information. Philosophy, moreover, was regarded as an integral human attitude that demanded not only mental acuity but also moral virtue and a well-balanced development of the human personality. This philosophy, or theology, is at the service of Man since it represents the integral human effort to grasp and understand the mystery of Being, our own being and our destiny, in order that we might be saved from hell, from unreality, from mere appearance and from an inauthentic existence here on earth. Philosophy has always been the intellectual part of religion, the human effort to understand the meaning of the whole universe (being, reality, etc.). This type of philosophy has always gone hand in hand with religion because, despite the outer tension between the two, it has always been difficult to critically comprehend—and purify—the answers that religion offers.

Indeed, not only were philosophers people of faith, but they actually founded their philosophy on their faith, making use of reason as a tool for simply explaining and analyzing what they believed to be true: the object of their faith. Philosophy was not an insignificant human activity or a kind of sport or hobby reserved for the privileged few, but rather the conscious and intellectual part of religion, considered to be the most crucial problem of human life, which directly concerned every individual in this world.

Here, if I may be permitted, I would like to add a comment of a somewhat auto-phenomenological nature. Fichte's assertion that "the type of philosophy one chooses depends on the type of man one is" applies very strongly here. If I am a believer, my philosophizing will bring me to a completely different existential position than if I were not a believer. Philosophy, unless it is reduced to phenomenology, cannot "parenthesize" existence; much less can the philosopher put aside his own existence and his own personal convictions. Pure "philosophical" inquiry into problems such as, for example, the existence of God are to the believer and the nonbeliever two radically different things.³ The "objective" reasons may be the same and both may be objectively valid, but my capacity for discovery is not the same when I am truly in doubt as when I am certain, nor do the arguments have the same power of persuasion when some "discovered" truth corresponds to my expectations (i.e., I already believed in it) as when it comes upon me like an unwanted guest. The believer as a philosopher no longer possesses the original innocence or inborn agnosia of the nonbeliever.⁴

³ Imagine you are engrossed in an exciting mystery novel. I, who have already read the book, tell you who the perpetrator of the crime is. At this point, even if you want to, you will no longer be able to read the book *as if* you did not know who the murderer is; the situation has completely changed. Likewise, a believer cannot—existentially—philosophize *as if* he did not know the conclusion. He can, of course, set aside his faith—from a technical or theoretical point of view—but he can never forget it. For the nonbeliever, philosophy has an almost tragic character; it all depends on his own particular philosophy. For the believer, on the other hand, it has a completely different meaning. He will verify, prove, clarify, and make intelligible what he already thinks he knows.

⁴ A lover complains to his friend, saying, "Just think, every day for two whole years I wrote to my girlfriend and now she tells me she's getting married to the postman." For the past three or four centuries European thought has been tackling ultimate problems using pure reason as an intermediary and applying pure philosophy in complete disregard of theology. There is no wonder, therefore, that it

The different meaning of philosophy to the believer and the nonbeliever could perhaps be explained by saying that to the nonbeliever philosophy represents the *ascending path* to an unknown peak, which he reaches by making use of his critical reason, while to the believer it is a *descending path* down to the valley, which begins on some remote peak from which he is, so to say, returning, again with the help of reason. The *path* may actually be one and the same, and both the believer and the nonbeliever will be able to contemplate the same landscape and analyze the same portion of reality when they find themselves on the same stretch of road, but the difference is enormous when it comes to *effort* (for one a difficult climb, for the other a smooth descent), *purpose* (one strives to reach the peak of Being, while the other seeks to make it intelligible, to understand it as far as he can), and *certainty* (while the one does not yet know whether his path will bring him to some conclusion or peak, or what he will find, the other already knows—or thinks he knows—what awaits him and is merely seeking further clarification). When these two meet on the road they may greet each other and perhaps sit down together and discuss certain questions, to their mutual profit, but as soon as they begin to talk about the summit or about continuing the journey, they will find that are marching in opposite directions. They will, for a time, have enjoyed a pleasant and perhaps fruitful conversation, but eventually they will have to face the ultimate problem, which is that of *conversion*. If they are to truly meet and continue along the path together, one of the two will have to turn around and walk in the opposite direction, to have a complete change of spirit and life. There is, in fact, no other alternative, unless both decide to stop and sit down on the ground and give up their human pilgrimage.

Laozi and Confucius, Parmenides and Heraclitus, Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, Augustine and Thomas, not to mention Avicenna and al-Ghazali, Philo and Maimonides, and so on, were all, properly speaking, theologians. Rather than limiting themselves, that is, to merely seeking a rational (perhaps almost rationalistic) explanation of rational data, they strove to fully understand all the *data*, that is, all that is *given* to Man. Why should data be intended only from the point of view of rational sense, when so many other things are *given* to us? Why trust only in reason when we in fact give credence to so many other things? The question, however, of the philosophical analysis or the intellectual comprehension (the intellect transcends reason) of all data in the sense of things *given*, including our forms of knowledge, is another subject for discussion.

In short, through the ages philosophy was not regarded as the discovery, or rather, the invention of reality by means of our reason, but as integral wisdom, that is to say, as Man's spiritual answer to the problem of existence. The configuration of this answer may be of an intellectual type, and consequently, reason is not excluded, but it is, nevertheless, only a part (albeit an essential part) of the human instrument, which allows Man to meet the demands of Being and participate in it.

The Evolution of the Concept of Philosophy in the West

The great adventure of European thought began in Greece with the idea, common to all cultures, that philosophy was synonymous with theology and represented an integral attempt to comprehend the ultimate questions of reality in the light of all the forms of knowledge that Man possesses. Philosophy was the love of wisdom, and this wisdom was an experimental knowledge, a *logos* on all that *is* (and most especially on Being, understood

has ended up falling in love with reason and rejecting faith. Without the immediacy of faith all we can do is "write letters" with our reason. Perhaps this *television* age of ours will help us break the deadlock!

as the Absolute or God) and the key to all that *is*. Philosophy, or to use the term coined by Plato, theology, was not merely connected with religion but was itself true religion, the constant preparation for death (Plato), because death is the beginning of eternal life. The philosopher is a lover of myths—a *philomythes* (Aristotle)—because myths have crystallized (to use a popular expression) the meaning of life and the idea of Being. Philosophy is the way to salvation (*stoa*) because it is only through the contemplation of Being that we are able to attain it and join with it (*gnosis*). A wise man, in fact, is he who laboriously attends to the salvation of his soul (Epicurus).

I should make it clear here that I am not expounding any new theory, from a Christian point of view.⁵ In Christian patristics philosophy means holiness,⁶ asceticism.⁷ Christ "has showed to us through his life and works true philosophy."⁸ Philosophy means "monastic life,"⁹ conceived as a life in perfect imitation of Christ.¹⁰

We are told that Adam was made similar to God through "philosophy."¹¹ *Philosophiae supremum culmen* means to closely follow Christ.¹² *Philosophiae desiderium*¹³ is the imperious aspiration to supernatural perfection.¹⁴ This idea of philosophy continued to prevail even during the Middle Ages,¹⁵ and throughout this entire period the modern problem of "Christian philosophy" had practically no meaning at all.¹⁶

This philosophy or theology included all forms of knowledge, since everything is related to ultimate questions. It was, in actual fact, a science, or better yet, it was simply *science* (from this period until the Middle Ages, however, science meant the knowledge of things from the point of view of their causes, i.e., knowing them as they really are—or, more exactly, knowing them as God knows them). And we, through theology and with the help of all our cognitive capacities, participate in this science. Philosophy contained, both in seed and in power, all that was later to take on the names of *particular* sciences, although these sciences were merely the branches that send back their findings to the trunk, so that philosophy can use them for the harmonious spiritual well-being—or salvation—of the whole person.

As we know, mainly because of the dialectic pressure exerted by their own methods, particular sciences gradually rid themselves of the protection of philosophy and strayed away from the *heteronomy* under which they lived, to develop into *independent* sciences. The whole evolution of European culture is summed up in this twofold movement of *positive* emancipation on one hand and *negative* disintegration on the other. Music, mathematics, and astronomy began the process; medicine and natural history continued it. The birth of "new science" and "new physics" (however old they actually were) represented another turning point in Western culture, while today we have witnessed the emancipation of the

⁵ Since Christians themselves are in danger of forgetting this particular point I will make an exception to how I normally present my thoughts and I will add a few notes on the subject.

⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaem* XVIII.4 (PG 57.269).

⁷ Cf. Penco (1960).

⁸ Nilus of Sinai, *Epistolarium* II.54 (PG 79.223).

⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* VI.1 (PG 35.721).

¹⁰ Cf. Hausherr (1955), pp. 56ff.

¹¹ Nilus of Sinai, *Sententiae* 34 (PG 79.1244).

¹² Cf. Bardy (1949).

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores eorum qui ad monasticam vitam inducunt* III.12 (PG 47.370).

¹⁴ Cf. Leclercq (1957), especially pp. 217ff.

¹⁵ Cf. Chenu (1957a).

¹⁶ Cf. Gilson (1936), pp. 1–4.

last progeny of philosophy: psychology, which has now become a "science." Although it is still apparently going through an adolescence crisis, it appears to be intent on asserting its autonomy and independence and insisting that it has nothing to do with philosophy, because it aspires to be a "science" like any other.

Now the most surprising fact in this evolution is that even "philosophy" has tried to emancipate itself from this all-embracing central wisdom. The peculiar destiny of this movement, however, consists not merely in the fact that the philosophical daughter has grown away from the mother, taking with her the name of "philosophy" (which to her is sacred), but also that the mother, thus deprived of integral philosophy and philosophical theology, has all but lost her former prominent role, and she who was once the trunk of the philosophical tree is now no more than just another branch of the same tree—a partial science. Thus we have come to conceive of theology as a pure "science," a dialectic deduction that draws its adroit conclusions on the basis of an already established revelation. Needless to say, as a particular "science" this "theology," while it remains a "prime science," is not true theology in its most genuine sapiential sense.

Fabricated by the nominalists of the Middle Ages, this divorce began with Descartes and became even more acute in "modern" European philosophy. There is, of course, a deep continuity at the foundation of the entire process of Western philosophy as a whole, and the timeless tradition has never completely disappeared. Heresy is only comprehensible, in fact, in connection with orthodoxy, on which, indeed, its very life depends. The work of St. Thomas and his school consisted precisely in drawing up a clear-cut, technical distinction between the fields of theology and philosophy without having to resort to separating the two disciplines, which would be fatal.

Anyone who is familiar with the evolution of Western thought will know only too well what this process means. Descartes simply drew the consequences of the European cultural situation of his time (the first half of the seventeenth century), and in this fact lies the importance and, at the same time, the limitation of his work. Philosophico-theological wisdom was in this period going through a serious crisis both externally and internally—externally because the independent ramifications of the various particular sciences (which were enjoying spectacular success) were spreading the "faith" that the sciences would save Man and secure the happiness of all without having to rely on philosophy or any form of religion, and internally because the numerous and vastly disparate opinions and irrelevant discussions, as well as (to put it briefly) the general situation of decadence, undermined the very foundations of a universal and incontrovertible wisdom. With the best intentions, Descartes was eager (being, as the first "modern" man, still deeply rooted in the Middle Ages) to save that wisdom, but in view of the weakness of "classical" theology and the prestige and breakthroughs of "science" he did this by attempting to convert philosophy into science, or at least (and here we see the emergence of an almost tragic dialectic) to introduce the *scientific method* in philosophy. By doing this, however, he emancipated philosophy from integral and theological philosophy and turned it into a "sure," "exact," and "scientific" "philosophy."

The purely rational scientific method was therefore introduced to establish a sure and incontrovertible system of truth that went beyond all the discussions of the various "schools": all that can be seen clearly and distinctly cannot be false and must therefore be accepted as *true*. While this is a correct benchmark, it ceases to be correct if it is reversed and absolutely objectified. Why must I declare, in fact, that the truth is *only* what I can accept as *true*? Who says that the *truth* is not beyond us, or that our *mind (mens)* is the *measure* of all things rather than the mirror (reflection) of the "measurability" of Being? And why also should I accept *only* what is presented to me in a clear and distinct way? Is my mind sensitive only to rational

evidence? I must of course accept as clear and distinct what I see clearly and distinctly; likewise, I am not obliged to accept as evident what does not appear to me as such. Why, though, should I reject what I hear or see less clearly and distinctly? I would not accept it as "clear," but I can always accept it *in the way* it is presented to me. And might it not be precisely the "supreme" things and the most important things that are beyond the limited field of vision of my naked eye? If I identify the truth with what I see clearly as true, in so doing I exclude all that is above or below or beyond a very specific element of my cognitive faculties, my reason. Thus philosophy becomes merely the rational effort to discover or produce reality, which is thus completely reduced to its rational structure.

This was the birth of "philosophy" as a new discipline, a "science," a new branch of ancient wisdom—although this "philosophy" no longer focused on the essential problems of human existence, which were now relegated to theology. In this moment "philosophy" became "certain," "critical," "mathematical," "rational," "logical," "dialectic," but it was no longer wisdom or integral knowledge, it no longer had any saving power, it was no longer wholly universal. It had, perhaps, become "common" to all men, but it no longer responded to the needs of Man as a whole or embraced the whole of the human personality. It was now reduced to a technical doctrine, to partial wisdom. Not even theology managed to escape the lure of "science." The "Sedes Sapientiae," the seat of wisdom, remained vacant for a long time in Europe, although it was the seat coveted by "theology," science, and also "philosophy." And this is precisely where the problem lies, in all its complexity. Despite everything, this new "philosophy," the daughter, has inherited the claims of the mother. Philosophy has found its formal object, but it has no intention of abandoning its claims to the total assumption of the material object. This means that all true philosophers, even in our rational age, have in one way or another perceived the ultimate character of philosophy and have set themselves the inevitable and perennial questions of our existence: What is Man? Where does he come from and where does he go? What must he do? and so on. The only problem is that the scientific method they use (applying purely rational inquiry to questions that are of a supra-rational nature) have made it impossible to give an integral answer, that is, an answer that fully satisfies Man's ontological yearning for truth and desire for salvation.

This fact, that within the field of pure "philosophy" there is an irreducible "residue" or, in other words, an underlying supra-rational element that continually emerges in all purely rational research, has been a constant stimulus in the evolution of Western philosophy and has brought contemporary philosophy to the extremely paradoxical situation that exists today. The philosophical "theology" of the Middle Ages has been replaced by a sort of theological "philosophy" (see, for example, existentialism).

Internal Philosophical Reflections

The very idea of a *purely* rational, rationalistic type of philosophy is, in fact, philosophically unsustainable.

From a *psychological* viewpoint, we can easily prove that is not only through reason that I discover what reality means to me or form my own philosophical convictions. When I am aware, in fact, of being in the world, of knowing, desiring, feeling, or, in short, living, I have already unknowingly experienced all these states. By the time my consciousness awakens it has already been influenced by many things and shaped with the help of a number of factors—indeed, perhaps it is thanks to all these that my consciousness has awoken. In any case, it acquires self-awareness through a nonconscious act in which my consciousness *receives* as data a whole series of elements that lead to what we might call primary convictions. These

convictions are not all necessarily true or objectively correct, and it is our right and our duty to verify and authenticate them, so that our lasting convictions may be the result of a free act of intellectual discrimination, intellectual acceptance, rather than the conclusions of logical deductions. Our deepest convictions (those regarding our existence, good and evil, the origin and purpose of our life, and so on), in fact, are by nature completely without any rational character. Furthermore, the whole complex mechanism by which we strive to achieve a comprehensive understanding of reality, ideas, words, feelings, culture, history, and so on, and even of our own intellect, has been given to us. Science might even be able to do without presuppositions if we limit and define its field of investigation and have a foothold outside its dominion, but no philosophy can do away with Being and start from scratch, because we ourselves—including our reason—are immersed in that same Being and begin from the same starting point.

From a *dialectical* point of view we can say that the very concept of a purely rational "philosophy" presupposes what we are discussing. If I try to philosophize using no more than pure reason, all I will be able to discover is the rational structure of Being. "Reality" will be rationality and rationality alone because my instrument is not tuned in to anything else. Thus, if I assume that reason is the only source of knowledge, I will recognize as real only what I can discover with my reason, and in so doing I will simply be negating and ignoring the specific nature of all other possible forms of *supra* (*infra* or *extra*) rational reality, making an exception for the rational precipitate of these same spheres of being. The knowledge of "being qua being" depends on Being itself and the kind of being I am. Why should I assume that I am only reason or that I can only come into contact with being through reason? Why should we have such blind faith in reason alone and trust only the conclusions of our reason? Let us remember that even Descartes had to invoke faith in God in order to justify his faith in reason.

Having said this, however, I do not in any way deny the power that our reason has in achieving transcendence. The fact is that reason pays the price for achieving transcendence by acknowledging its own inadequacy. This means that while reason is capable of forming a vague idea of the existence of the Absolute, it is only able to discover the outer crust (so to speak) of the Absolute, and once the Absolute has been discovered, human reason must then logically (i.e., reasonably) make its claim as the predominant and ultimate human instance and accept the supremacy of the Absolute. In short, the highest function of rational philosophy is undoubtedly the relinquishing of its claim as the highest form of wisdom.

From an *anthropological*, or simply philosophical, point of view we can still say that philosophy as the ultimate wisdom cannot rely solely on reason, because the task of the essence of reason is not to discover reality, nor yet to actively direct the human person, but simply to check and confirm, to explain and verify what it has been offered and passively record the behavior of Man. Man possesses many powers besides reason, and the best part of our intellect is not constituted by reason, but by intuition, and therefore if philosophy is to be a universal "science" and all-encompassing knowledge, it cannot be limited to the assertions of reason alone and should hence be integrated into a higher and broader form of intellection. Reason itself, moreover, with the help of the highest part of our intellect, is able to define its own boundaries and set a limit to its own claims. The defining of this upper limit of reason (the lower limit is determined by the law of contradiction) will be one of the most crucial problems of modern-day philosophy if we are to incorporate scientific "philosophy" into philosophical philosophy.

The evolution of the West, however, did not stop here. Despite its attempts to do away with metaphysics completely, Western culture nevertheless witnessed the reemergence not only of metaphysics but also of ontology as the main philosophical disciplines. And after

discarding theology as a shortsighted, almost primitive discipline, today philosophy is once again becoming theological and relaunching the theological and even religious problems of mankind.

In short, "philosophy" itself is emerging from a deep yet indiscriminate *sophia* as a well-defined human discipline and is gradually becoming aware of its own nature. On one hand it deals with ultimate problems (material object), while on the other it is coming to terms with the fact that it does not have the last word on these problems because pure "philosophy" is strictly limited by its own peculiar and rigorous method (formal object), and so it is obliged to give room to theology and religion. It becomes, in a word, humble, because it finds its own level and is aware of its inadequacy in responding to supreme human needs.

The Meaning of the New Orientation

My aim here is not to further develop these ideas or outline, even concisely, the nature of an integral and philosophical philosophy. It goes without saying that in using the term "integral" I am not alluding to a closed system, a construction that is complete in itself, a perfect vision that does not allow for progress and evolution, which leaves no room for "mystery" and cannot comprehend what is beyond all possible comprehension. Not only is all human knowledge imperfect here on earth, but human beings themselves are incomplete and itinerant. However, there are two ideas that can help to connect these reflections with the question of the need for a new orientation in Indic philosophy.

The first might be expressed as follows: Reorientation might mean to turn back again toward the East, but the East is something more than just a geographical concept or an anti-Western metaphor. The word *orient* derives from the Latin *oriri* ("to rise") and means the *origin* of something (in this case, the direction where the sun rises). Indic philosophy, like every other philosophy (or simply, philosophy in general), has to be directed once again toward its origin, that is, philosophy. Indic philosophy must be revitalized not because it is Indic but because it is a philosophy. It must return not simply to the original sources of its own ancient speculation but to the source of philosophy itself—in other words, to the problems and the very substance of living Man as he is and as he exists today in the here and now. I am not talking about a return to "things" themselves, because the problem is never purely objective. On the other hand, neither is it purely subjective, which explains why it is not enough to simply go back to ourselves or our past. The problem arises precisely on the line of intersection between the subjective and the objective, between Man and the rest of reality. This is also why a problem is always actual and always present. Only if we are present, if we are actual, will we also be eternal. Indic philosophy must be reoriented through philosophy itself and not any other nationalistic or sentimental motive.

And this brings me to the second idea: philosophy. Following the incomparable experience of Western philosophy and the destruction and reconstruction of the European adventure, it is no longer a question of repeating old *heteronomic* misapplications, or of indulging in *autonomic* reactions and resentments. It has now, in our historical present, finally become possible to truly bring about a new *ontonomic* synthesis, in which unity does not destroy variety, nor synthesis analysis, and the Absolute does not obscure the relative, where everything can truly find its own place, its *ontic* order (*ontology*) according to its own ontological laws (*nomos*) in this wonderful cosmos of ours. It is not a question of undoing (or, much less, ignoring) all that has been accomplished in the West but of integrating it into a catholic, or universal, wisdom. The "heresy" of "modern" autonomous philosophy was perhaps the shortcut that was needed to do away with the patronizing heteronomous

attitude and develop all the possibilities of human reason. Now is the time, however, to recapitulate on a higher level.

The most impressive characteristic of the authentic philosophical effort in the West today is the intimate discovery of the failure of pure "philosophy" or, in other words, the fact that the deep-seated inadequacy of pure "philosophy" is itself a philosophical discovery. Distress, fear, death, doubt, openness, and also evolution, existence (*ex-sist*), *da-sein*, problems/limits, and many other categories of our contemporary philosophical worlds—such as philosophical belief, myth, symbolism, and so on—are simply milestones on the path of philosophy toward a broader and more mature wisdom tending toward a form of theological synthesis that is more comprehensive and yet a-systematic, since it is always open and fragmented.

At the same time, however, this failure, this sense of frustration that exists in Western philosophy, brings with it the purification and salvation of philosophy, because it opens the way to theology and religion. Philosophy today is no longer striving to save Man, but it is still ultimate, in the sense that it saves God for Man, so that God—and not philosophy—can truly save Man.

Indic philosophy is still in the phase of unity and indiscrimination. It is superior to Western philosophy in the sense that it is theology and religion together, although it is precisely in this position that its danger and its weakness lie. Its weakness emerges when we consider the technical and precise aspect of "philosophy," and its danger lies in the temptation to attempt to save mankind through its "philosophical" rather than "religious" content. The weakness and the danger of Western philosophy, on the other hand, lie in the fact that it excludes theology and is therefore prone to the temptation of denying—or substituting—theology and religion.

We might better understand these two different attitudes by examining a significant point of difference that exists between the main philosophical concerns of the West and those of India: Western philosophy is generally concerned with *prime* questions, whereas Indic philosophy is more interested in *ultimate* questions.

Western philosophical speculation has always focused on problems concerning the *beginnings* of things and of our thought, the *foundation* and the *basis* of our knowledge, human life, society, and being. A great many philosophers have returned again and again to the same problems, not for the sake of originality or a nonconformist attitude but because they were deeply convinced that philosophy is in fact destined to start over again and again, since the philosophical problem *κατ' ἐξοχήν* is precisely that of beginning, and of *the* beginning. In this context, therefore, it is obviously not by chance that I mention that two of the main sources of the Christian Holy Scripture (one concentrating in itself the entire Old Testament attitude and the other providing us with the key of the New Covenant) begin precisely by telling us, respectively, that "in the beginning" God created, and "in the beginning" was the Word. Western speculation is constantly plagued by the problem of prime and primary foundations. New meta-sciences are continually seeing the light in our contemporary Western culture (meta-logic, meta-psychology, meta-painting, meta-history, etc.), and it is not without significance that the supreme science of being has also been called metaphysics and interpreted not so much as a science of transcendent being that lies beyond, but a science of the immanent field that lies behind it.

There is a difference, in fact, between asking what lies beyond being and striving to understand what is behind it. As we well know, every turning point in the history of Western philosophy is marked by the discovery of a new anterior foundation, a prime base. Socrates contrasts the *ἀρχαί* of the early Greek philosophers with something even earlier: his anthropological problem. Descartes sought in Scholastic philosophy the prime foundation that gives us knowledge of the metaphysical order, and likewise did Kant, Hegel, Husserl,

and Heidegger. All endeavored to return to an earlier problem, a deeper foundation, a more primal beginning.

Indic philosophy, on the contrary, is concerned with the ultimate question and projects further and further ahead, beyond time, space, spirit, and being. *Turiya* (and also *turiyatita*) is a category of the Indic spirit that transcends all and moves constantly forward. It is not beginnings that are the subject of investigation, but the end. It is not the beginning of change, for example, that constitutes the main problem of a movement, but the end of the change, its final stage. In short, *brahman* (including also *saguna brahman*) is the typical object of a philosophy that is enchanted and attracted by the question of the Ultimate, intended primarily in a religious and eschatological rather than secular sense. The ultimate question is the main question. What matters is not so much understanding the origins but rather reaching the destination, the knowledge, and realization of the ultimate end.

The extremes meet, of course, so that when you reach the origin you also find the ultimate source. It is not only physical space that is circular; the mental space in which our spirit moves is also. While, on the one hand, this interest in the Ultimate that is characteristic of Indic philosophy is conditioned by its religious attitude, on the other hand it is also determined by a particular mind-set and developed through a centuries-old tradition. The mutual enrichment that can arise from the meeting of these two philosophical mentalities is so obvious that it needs no emphasizing.

It is through this meeting, in fact, that Indic philosophy will be able to reveal its full potential if it strives to assimilate the entire Western experience and unite it with the main line of thought of a (unfairly forgotten) theological philosophy. Whether we should reserve the term "philosophy" for scientific, that is, purely rational, "philosophy" and refer to the other, more comprehensive wisdom as theology, or else continue, along with all other cultures, to call it philosophy, is a question that may perhaps be of some interest from a cultural-political point of view, but is not important from a philosophical perspective. I would be inclined to restore the ancient function and central position that was characteristic of philosophy (*sofodicea*) when it referred to the integral effort to attain Ultimate Wisdom, and its field of research was not far from that of theology. It is superfluous to say that this philosophy is neither irrational nor a-rational, and that reason plays an important and essential part in it. While not having any absolute monopoly over other forms of human knowledge or exerting any kind of totalitarian dictatorship, in fact, reason must always be present to prevent any unnatural imposition originating from other forms of knowledge or other rules of action.

If, however, these reflections were interpreted as a kind of self-righteous complacency on the part of Indic philosophy (as if the West were now beginning to discover that Eastern wisdom was not so far amiss after all, and Indic thinkers could leisurely smile at the discoveries of Western philosophers as they waited to add them to their ancient categories), the essential meaning of these notes would be missed completely and, more to the point, the opportunity that is being offered to Indic philosophy would be lost. First of all, the evolution of Western philosophy has a clearly positive and progressive value, and second, the urgent task of Indic philosophy is not to go back to its past but to firmly face the present. Both of these will come together at a later stage, on the real, tangible ground of an open and itinerant philosophy.

Summing up (or rather, touching the tip of our problem), we find, once again, the cosmic and triumphant law of the Cross, which is valid also in the case of the fate of Indic philosophy. Like its Western counterpart, Indic philosophy must disappear, die, surrender, and consecrate itself to the real problems of modern Man. It must free itself from everything

that might represent a bond just because it is Indic (or Western), so it may rise again, not only more Indic than before but also more universal, as an integral part of an ecumenical, perennial philosophy.

The New Theological Orientation

Inasmuch as they are human constructions, neither philosophy nor theology are atemporal values. The question of the possible and desirable reorientation of Indic philosophy, precisely because it is a philosophical question, is of a definitely temporal nature. The new orientation of Indic philosophy depends not only on this philosophy but also on the position of the rest of the contemporary philosophical world. On this question I would like to say just one thing: the arena in which Indic philosophy may truly find this new orientation and reaffirm its position is this very meeting with Christian theology.

Strictly speaking, Indic wisdom is not a "philosophy," but a theology. This does not mean it is pure *mīmāṃsā*, or merely a bare commentary to a specific set of texts, nor yet that it is based on dogmas that despise reason. Theology, in fact, is the effort to understand reality in its entirety, using all the forms of knowledge that Man possesses, among which faith is recognized as preeminent, but not exclusive. Indic wisdom strives to decipher the mystery of reality, to explain everything that *is*, without ever forgetting that the underlying energy of all its efforts does not spring from mere intellectual curiosity but from an existential interest whose aim is the salvation of Man. Indic wisdom is not just a speculative science, it is also a practical art. One of the most serious moral damages caused by Western influence was undoubtedly that of having contributed to the succumbing of certain modern *pandit* to the high technical prestige of Western philosophy, causing them to attempt to interpret Indic wisdom based on purely rational categories of an almost rationalistic character.

For the very fact that it springs from the same deep religious concern, the challenge to Indic wisdom does not come from Western philosophy but Western theology and, more specifically, Christian theology. It is here that Indic wisdom finds its counterpart, and it is on the same ground that Christian theology faces its challenge. Both Western Christian theology and Indic theology of philosophical analysis must make full use of the philosophical analysis of modern philosophy, accepting and adopting, as long as necessary, the insights and discoveries of "philosophy," but they should also be well aware that their interest is much deeper and vaster than that of pure "philosophy"—deeper because faith does not destroy reason but rather integrates it, expands it, and allows us to penetrate into the depths of Being with the light of reason; vaster because both are concerned not with pure speculation or simple thought but with life experienced in its most concrete form—that which allows living individuals to reach their goal and find fulfillment.

Indic wisdom may find in Christian theology the inspiration for the new orientation it needs, and vice versa. I have specifically used the word "challenge," however, because as fruitful and enriching as this meeting may prove to be for both sides, it nevertheless touches the very foundations of Indic wisdom.

An encounter between Indic wisdom and post-Cartesian philosophy would result in a nonbinding, superficial relationship. In contact with Western thought, Indic wisdom might refine its own categories or, at the most, borrow others, or it might deepen its investigations with the help or influence of "philosophy," whereas an encounter with Christian theology would take place in the very heart of the two wisdoms. The similarity of their interests and problems will allow them to discover their inevitable deep differences, which cannot be overlooked or minimized once they have been uncovered. This encounter is truly a challenge. The

new orientation is not, therefore, something purely epidermal or external, but a concrete new direction that must be subjected to critical scrutiny. Unlike technical "philosophy," theology is pledged and committed and involves Man in his entirety; it represents a true *κρίσις*, or crisis, since what is at stake is existential truth—in other words, the very way to Man's salvation.

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Since it is not my task (at least not here) to suggest what issues might arise in this meeting, or along which lines it should proceed, I will merely cite a few examples for the sake of clarifying the problem.

Right from the beginning of this chapter we have talked about faith, intended not as blind belief but a new anthropological dimension that brings with it a new form of knowledge and a high understanding that includes reason (faith only makes sense to rational beings—a dog, for example, cannot have faith). Now, the Christian faith, as far as it meets the general requisites of what we call faith, aspires to be regarded as faith of a strictly supernatural, that is, divine nature. This faith is the free response to a free gift of God and can be neither proven nor imposed. All this is not entirely alien to Indic wisdom which, after all, deals with the same problems. What we must do, nevertheless, is first of all verify both conceptions of faith and then separately examine the two faiths in order to reach the heart of the problem. On this level the question of a new orientation becomes a burning issue.

Indic philosophy, moreover, studies the problem of the Absolute in close connection with the destiny of Man. In this regard also, the encounter with Christian theology presents us with the possibility of an orientation that goes far beyond merely being able to adopt a certain terminology or tackle a certain type of analysis. The same could also be said with regard to problems such as personality, grace, and so on. In short, the new orientation of Indic philosophy is a theological problem. The challenge comes from within, and the encounter with another theology will throw human wisdom into a situation of crisis, forcing it to make a decision, find its way, and renew itself. Any true *reorientation* is, to some extent, a *conversion* to Life and Truth.

CREATION IN INDIC METAPHYSICS¹

vāg vai brahma, tasyā eṣa paṭiḥ
"The Word is brahman, and this is its Lord."

—BU I.3.21

General Outline

The Concept of Ontonomy

On the whole, over the centuries the Western culture has gone through two almost complete stages: that of *theologism*, followed by that of *humanism*. Today it is on the point of entering a new age, which we shall call the age of *theandrisim*.

We will not even attempt to sum up the first two periods, since to do so we would have to apply a precise series of qualifications in order to present a panorama that does not risk appearing historically false. We will limit ourselves, therefore, to highlighting the two fundamental aspects, *heteronomy* and *autonomy*. Our purpose is to develop, in contrast with these two, the concept of *ontonomy*, which, in our opinion, represents the key to understanding the current cultural situation, and the thread letting us find our way in the central question of "creation" in Indic philosophy.

We must resist the temptation to explain this concept by dwelling on cultural considerations or the philosophy of history; it would not, in fact, be possible to do so in such a limited space, and neither would it be relevant to the problem with which we are dealing. We will therefore be addressing only the metaphysical aspect of this complex question.

The ultimate problem of human intelligence is that of Being—or, more precisely, that of Being and beings. It is the problem of Plato's *ἐν καὶ πολλὰ*, of the Indic *ātman-brahman*, the Islamic *Haqq-Khalq* (Sufism), and so on. Efforts made to resolve this problem within traditional cultures have so far involved the sphere of heteronomy, while autonomy arose as a reaction against the absolute hegemony of Being in favor of the very substantial nature of beings.

Heteronomy

The first historico-cultural period might perhaps have defined itself as a *theonomic* rather than a heteronomous era. In actual fact, the Patristic age and the greater part of the early Middle Ages had understood the real situation of the creature, without, however, succeeding in expressing it completely with all its consequences or in full awareness. Heteronomy, in fact, has a somewhat unconscious side, because it is only perceived as such when the aware-

¹ Original text: R. Panikkar, *Maya e Apocalisse. L'incontro dell'induismo e del cristianesimo* (Rome: Abete, 1966), chap. 3.

ness of the creature's heterogeneousness has made its appearance. In other words, perhaps the deepest awareness of the people of that period was not actually heteronomy, but the concepts that were available at that time were neither sufficiently developed nor adequately self-aware to be able to offer a clear definition of the relationship between Being and beings without overlooking in some way the peculiarity of "things." Thus, the inaccuracy of expression, the vagueness of concepts, and a certain lack of self-awareness prepared the way for *humanistic* criticism, which is the dominating characteristic of the second age.

Needless to say, these two ages cannot be divided in watertight compartments within strict chronological limits, since they often overlap and the respective dates cannot be accurately determined. Nevertheless, in the Western world, history tells us that the first category prevailed mostly up until the beginning of the Modern Age and the second from then until today.

Since heteronomy has no awareness of itself, in describing it we will have to suppose that autonomic awareness already exists. We may, then, sum it up as follows.

Beings are contingent, which means that the reason for their existence, or the ultimate foundation of their being, is *ab alio*—they proceed from Another. From this Other they receive everything: existence, essence, and the logical, physical, and metaphysical laws that govern them. To know what a being is and, above all, what its purpose is, the most (and, ultimately, only) important thing is not to know *that* isolated being in itself but to know the intention of the Other. The revelation, intended here as the Word of God (*Verbum mentis*, not *Verbum entis*), not only shows us the way to salvation but also offers us the best if not the only means for discovering the nature of all other beings and the meaning of every event. Medical experiments on human corpses, for example, were once forbidden not only out of respect for the dead person, but also because it was not considered necessary to carry out experiments in order to know the true nature of Man, and this applied also to his mortal body.

Heteronomy emphasizes the transcendence of God and, at the same time, His absoluteness. God is good; hence His rule is not tyranny, but a kingdom of love. Nevertheless, He is a sovereign who rules from the outside and must be obeyed. Heteronomy, on the other hand, is profoundly *realistic*. God is Another precisely because we are ourselves. If it were not for our substantial awareness of the *ego*, God could not have been interpreted as the Totally Other. Likewise, He is considered as being transcendent simply because there exists on earth something to transcend: us, ourselves. In actual fact, however, heteronomy pure and simple, still-innocent heteronomy, would not agree with this summary of itself, as it would never have imagined that it could lead to such an interpretation.

The master line of heteronomy runs through the contingent character of the creature and transcendence from the Godhead. Not only are all beings subject to movement, since only God is the "unmoved mover," but He draws us to Him *ὡς ἐρωμενον* (inasmuch as He is loved by us) through a certain outer appeal. Beings depend completely on God, and to ask ourselves whether this dependence comes from nature or the will of God would itself be an opening up to the autonomist position.

Autonomy

This second attitude has a twofold aspect: on one side it is almost a *negative* reaction against heteronomy, and on the other it represents a *positive* (from its own point of view) attempt to form a concept of "being" without having to refer to any external Supreme Being. The first aspect tends toward pantheism and the second toward atheism, though neither of the two needs necessarily to fall into one of these two extremes.

Autonomy rejects every imposition that comes from the outside. The first aspect, the *negative*, emphasizes the freedom of the human spirit, the individuality of beings, and in a completely special way, the dignity of the human person. A typical example of this can be found in Kantian ethics: an ethics of purposiveness is an impure ethics; an *ego* that merely pursues its own perfection and happiness would represent the worst form of spiritual egoism, and so on. It could be demonstrated historically that this reaction against an extrinsic and transcendental God leads to the absolute identification of beings with the Being—in other words, to pantheism.

A dialectical reflection, in fact, would bring us to the same conclusion: if a thing cannot have its being outside itself (and this is precisely the case autonomy would present against heteronomy and that seems to be a requisite of the principle of noncontradiction since, if the being of A were B, then A would be Non-A), this means that it has within itself the beginning and end of its being. This is the very principle of autonomy. Now, if it is true that beings *are* in themselves, if everything they must be is already in them, and if their progress is simply an expansion of their nature, this means that there is an innermost divine core that constitutes the very depth of their being. Autonomy cannot accept the indigence of beings, and so it deifies them in their principle. Not only so-called modern philosophy but also a certain type of Christian “modernism” is moving in this direction.

On the other hand, the attempt to build a *positive* autonomy leads to atheism, as all the experiences of idealism clearly show.

Autonomy needs to be founded on something that is not an external God. Its foundation can only be human reason. This acts as the criterion of truth, and also of good. The process is very familiar. Reason is considered an absolute, like a God, and yet it is unable to firmly establish itself on this pedestal of Divinity. Thus we come to realize that such deification is merely an anachronistic residue and not absolutely necessary. The next step is the reducing of reason to relativistic, existential, individual, atomized reason, which does not need to be absolute. This in itself is atheism.

Remaining within the metaphysical order, the formulation of the problem appears clear. If a being is, it is. As a being (*νοούμενον*, *Ding an sich*, *Wesenheit*, etc.—the rest, in fact, being merely appearance, *δοξα*, *Erscheinung*), it is independent, it is *in itself*, and it is within itself that it must find the laws that govern its development. Here, then, are the “monads” with no God and, consequently, with no possible relationship. Solipsism and statements such as “communication is impossible,” “hell is other people,” and so on, follow this line of reasoning. Autonomy is the imprisoning of the being within its own walls, its suffocation and annihilation due to a lack of *communion* with the Being.

Ontonomy

The creature *is not* God, God *is not* the creature: it appears this must be stated on the basis of the principle of noncontradiction itself. Nevertheless, this statement is not completely true. The relationship between God and the creature is neither heteronomous nor autonomous. In both propositions the verb “is” is not univocal but merely analogous. The creature *is not* God, of course, but it is not true that God *is not* the creature. “Is not” means nothing to the Being who *is* absolutely. God *is not* creature, certainly, but everything that *is* must *in some way* be God, as we will see shortly. The creature, on the other hand, is not non-God (since God *is*, there is no such thing as *non-God*) and neither is it God. The creature *is not* God, but *is of* God and *in* God and *from* God. The creature *is not*, it *is-with*. The reality of our being is the reality of an *esse-ab*, an *esse-cum*, and an *esse-in*, of an *e-xistence*, a *con-sistence*, and an

in-sistence that makes all autonomy and all heteronomy impossible. Beings do not have their being *outside* themselves or even *in* themselves or *with* themselves (God is neither above nor within beings, nor is he mixed together with them), but they *are* and their being is an *esse-nte*, a being *of, from, and with* Being.

The νομος of every being is neither an autonomous law that belongs to it and derives from its independent, isolated (autonomous) nature, nor an extrinsic and extraneous (heteronomous) law that is imposed on it by Another.

God is not the Other, He is not the Whole, and neither is He the Same—with reference to the beings. At the same time, He cannot be considered the soul of being, the innermost core of every being, its *entelecheia*, form, or whatever else we might wish. All these expressions, in spite of their aspiration to maintain unity with God, are still too dualistic.

Beings are-not God, but neither are they non-God. We said earlier that they *are-of, are-with, and are-in* (God). We might also add (in the hope of being perfectly clear) that they *are* not-nothing and that they are not God, because they *are-not-yet*, that is, they are not-nothing since they have not yet reached God; they have ceased to be nothing, and they are *not yet* God because they *will be* God. A being *is* insofar as it *will be*, insofar as it *will be-being*, that is, as it *will be*-God. In the end, when everything shall be submitted to Christ, God *will be* all and in all.² But, let us be careful: the creature should not be confused with divine Persons: God *will not be* God, God *is*. On the other hand, we *will be* God. Temporality or, more accurately, *tempiternity*, it is the mark of our creatureliness. The created being is not only the potential of being; it is the hope of becoming the Being.

Beings are *no-nada* (not-nothing), to use the profound Spanish expression. Mysticism speaks of *a-no-nada-miento*: we must destroy the *a* (no offense to philologists!), our negation of nothing (*no-nada*), if we are to find our true nature and flow into God.

The ontic structure that ontonomy seeks is neither an intrinsic bond nor an extrinsic relationship. God is not ετερος, neither is the creature an αυτος. We are, rather, a συ αυτος, or better still, a σεαυτου (from you), and He, God, is an εαυτος (αυτος)—himself—or, more accurately, εαυτοις (αυτοις)—to themselves—Trinity. All too often, divine dynamism has been regarded as an imperfection because movement, in the order of the created world, implies imperfection. It is not, however, that God moves or remains in a state of rest depending on the meaning we give to these expressions. In God there is a tension, a relationship, and a divine interior life. This divine “dynamism” is in some way partaken of *ad extra*. This is why the traditional idea of beings intended as creatures that are purely dependent on the knowledge and love of God is the closest to the truth. Creatures exist inasmuch as they are known and loved by God; they are merely the end of a loving gaze from the Godhead.

Ontonomy expresses this special character of beings and uncovers the profound laws deriving from ον, considered in its entirety and from the standpoint of the sui generis relationship it has with the Source and Origin of every being.

In the history of Christianity there is a characteristic example according to which this moment—which is truly constituting and peculiar to the structure of our mentality—may also be found in other religions. I refer to the famous theological discussion *de auxiliis* between Thomism (or, rather, Bañezism)—which was inclined toward safeguarding the rights of the Godhead and, to this purpose, emphasized the heteronomy of the action of the created being—and Molinism, which, being born in a humanistic century, tended to defend the rights of the creature and especially of the free Man, and strove to restore human autonomy

² Cf. 1 Cor 15:28.

to its rightful place. The solution, nevertheless (as history has amply demonstrated), can be found neither within the horizon of heteronomy nor that of autonomy, but must be sought within the ontonomic order of beings.

In this order, it is not a question of an action of mine that I perform at God's *side* (here, on a moral level, there are formulas that are efficient but quite unfortunate, such as "God helps those who help themselves," "Act as if everything depended on you, and pray as if everything depended on God," etc.), nor an action that is of God and is attributed to me. The point in question is a truly *theandric* action (which will only be understood after introducing Christ), an action that springs from my being, and that, nevertheless, *is-of, for, and in* God, not only in its conduct but in the ultimate structure of its own entity.

Ontonomy does not do violence to beings by imposing on them an extrinsic and heterogeneous law, nor, however, does it leave them without an inner bond, ignoring the intimate concatenation belonging to the very nature of beings, their deep oneness and constitutive relationship with Being. It discovers the mysterious and intrinsic laws that allow the harmonious development (within a certain measure, of course, due to the original sin) of a being according to its intimate constitution and without doing violence to the other beings. There exists an ontonomic order that we must discover, because it is this order alone that expresses the true structure of the world.

The *νομος* of every being expresses, in some way, an aspect of the Godhead. These laws are the laws of Being; in other words, they are expressions of the very structure and real constitution of things, but they, along with the governing beings, come *from* God and are *of* God and *in* God. They are, so to speak, the laws of the Godhead *ad extra*. Clearly, the word "laws" is used here in a metaphysical rather than a strictly juridical, scientific, or moral sense.

Ontonomy is the expression of the tangible way by which every being is able to truly become *being*, to return, in other words, to the bosom of the Godhead from which it has proceeded. Ontonomy expresses the process of the return of the cosmos to God, the *regressus* of the universe, or better still, the hidden nature of the new heavens and the new earth³, how it is revealed in the form, the *σχημα* of this passing world. It now becomes clear that, after the cosmic fall of the world, this development cannot be a dialectical development of Being but is, rather, the gradual progress (one aspect of which might be dialectics), the tangible historical itinerary of beings toward their ontic origin. The path is redemption.

The function of ontonomy appears equally clear if we apply it to the relationship between different spheres of beings. Only ontonomy allows the truly intrinsic development of the lower sphere without mortifying its nature while, at the same time, enabling it to collaborate harmoniously with the upper spheres. For example, it is common knowledge that, if the economic order is made independent, it will end up suffocating Man, because, once left to themselves, the economic forces will develop pathologically and, like a financial cancer, invade society and condition Man, reducing him to a condition of actual slavery. On the other hand, however, if we attempt to direct and control economic laws from the outside—to impose heteronomy on the economic sphere—it will lead to statism, tyranny, and political totalitarianism. Inversely, ontonomy strives to find the deep structures of the economic order itself and discover more and more points of contact with the other anthropological dimensions. This will make it possible to safeguard not only all the higher values of the society but also Man's dignity and the real—and not only fair—needs of the economic sphere.

³ Cf. Rev 21:1.

These laws may, perhaps, be the laws of minimum probability and will demand, therefore, the presence of catalysts, (human) factors that do not merely follow the path of least resistance and are not sensitive only to the dictates of the lower impulses. This is a very important task for modern-day theological and philosophical reflection.

After all, the relationship between Being and beings presents our philosophical spirit with these aporias not only because this relationship is enclosed in the same divine Mystery but also because, in the way in which it is contemplated by pure philosophy, it does not correspond to the profound reality of the existing order. According to the traditional, more audacious answer, it was already maintained that beings *are* creation and that creation is none other than a certain relationship, *relatio quaedam*. Now, the true existential relationship of Being with beings—which only genuine Christian (christocentric) thought may discover—does not belong to the order of (pure) “creation” or that of (pure) “nature,” but to the order of *facticity*: from having been *made* by Christ, by whom everything has been made, has received life, or more precisely, has come into being, *παντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο*.⁴ Beings, by virtue of Christ, *are* generation, *γενεσις*, where *genesis* means a *certain becoming*. All beings are *in* Christ, *from* Christ, and *with* Christ. The being, the creature, “made” or “created,” is none other than a *Christophany*.

God is transcendent. He lives within an inaccessible light; no one has ever seen Him.⁵ The *μονογενής* who is within Him, who has revealed Him to us,⁶ that is, the Christ, is not only the moral Mediator, he is also the ontic Mediator. Beings *are* inasmuch as they partake *of* Christ. From the divine perspective, outside of God there is nothing, and in God (without yet being, in time, *wholly* God) there is only Christ. All that *is*, in Christian terms, is the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. All existing beings are merely parts, participations, imitations, potentials, hopes, expectations, fragments . . . (language does not have adequate terms to express the concept), members of the Mystic Body of Christ, members of the Whole Christ. Only if we begin from this christocentric point of view can we penetrate the mystery of the relationship between God and creatures and understand also the concept of ontology in its various connotations and on the basis of its historical justification. Beings *are with* Christ, *of* God (*from* the Word and *in* the Spirit). All of this, however, as with every truly ultimate problem, exceeds the limits of philosophy.

The Category of Creation

If we are to grasp the Indic problem of creation we must not begin by asking ourselves *from where in time* the world originates, or *how, scientifically*, it was formed, or *of what, materially speaking*, its structure is composed. Not only do all these questions (temporal, scientific, and material) appear too Western in their formulation and also prevent a true comprehension of the Indic problem of creation, but they also make us incapable of penetrating the very mystery of existence.

Nor should we begin by examining *from where* or *why* or *for what* or *how* the world or the universe exists. We should ask ourselves, first of all, “what” the world is. We are obliged by our inadequacy of thought and expression to use this little word “what,” but in actual fact it is not so much the “what” we are seeking as the “is,” or, in other words, “being.”

Ultimately, the problem of creation is not the problem of the beginning, the process of be-coming, or the problem of the origin or the prime cause; it is the problem of being itself.

⁴ Jn 1:3.

⁵ 1 Tim 6:16; Jn 1:18.

⁶ Jn 1:18.

The separation that exists in European metaphysics between these two problems—that of creation and that of being (though there is a difference between them, in fact, it is not an ontic difference)—has produced a so-called metaphysics that, in actual fact, is hardly more than philosophical physics.

It is true that the structure of our thought (though not necessarily of being) is made up in such a way that we are *hardly* able to say something about “being” without calling upon the other secondary or prepositional questions. And it is exactly in this *hardly* and its meaning that the real problem of creation lies.

The Christian Western culture (rather than simply the Christian culture) would reply that things, beings, are *creation-creatures*. The “what” of creation, even grammatically, may be only a relationship, but in saying this we still do not give a satisfactory answer to the problem of beings that are already “made,” beings that have had their “becoming.” India might have something to add on the matter, and a theandric conception would certainly make an additional contribution.

To understand the Indic texts on creation, we must deal directly with the fact that the problem of creation (or, more accurately, the active and passive character of the creation of beings and, perhaps, of being) is in itself a category that cannot be reduced to other categories and can only inadequately be compared with them.

If, for example, we say that the world originated from nothing, or that it was caused by God, we are speaking of a be-coming and a cause that are entirely special and have not the slightest trace of *reality* in common with our ordinary cosmic processes of origin or cause. They are, in fact, of such a nature that we can only understand them in a derived and transcendent sense. Although the world is creation, and the universe is a creature, there are no cosmic facts or processes that can have this character. If what is created is a relationship, this relationship is completely unique and special; this analogy is in itself unique, which is the same as saying that it is only similar to other analogies. Creation is creation; the creature is creature and cannot be referred to any other category.

The Indic texts are neither “metaphysical” in a *heteronomous* sense, nor poetic or metaphorical in an *autonomous* sense. I much prefer to consider them “meta-theological” within an *ontonomic* atmosphere (even though the latter is not always clearly defined). These texts have no other purpose than to describe in different ways this unique and special object: creation. To understand them better we would have to read them in song or prayer, without subjecting the emerging concepts to a detailed hyper-logical or hyper-rationalistic examination, without interrupting the symphony of the word or the song and losing ourselves in comparisons and attempts at analysis. It is characteristic of their order that they cannot be fully comprehended. If certain parts are found to be inconsistent, or certain concatenations appear to be weak, it is no cause for alarm; these also will have to be assimilated and integrated. Monks do not interrupt their chants to consult dictionaries.

On the whole, the main intuitions of Indic cosmology are still valid, even though the conceptual formulation is often imperfect and heteronomous. Let us put aside, for the moment, the question of whether and to what extent the Indic tradition has understood and correctly interpreted the true essence of its “sacred” or “inspired” texts. These texts undoubtedly contain elements of high truth that have been forgotten by the West, yet belong, nevertheless, to a possible, more universal *philosophia perennis*, with which they must be integrated. This is one of the main tasks of modern culture. It is perfectly possible, however, that Indic philosophy has failed to draw all the truth from the conception of creation contained in its holy books, and that the full depth of these same principles can only become evident through contact with the Spirit of Christianity.

Creatio a Deo

The European Christian thought has always emphasized a particular aspect of the creative act which, in India, does not appear to be as important or central, although it is not considered completely strange or inappropriate. Christian theology, in reacting against the Greek philosophical idea of a first matter, has strongly accentuated the fact that the divine act of creation is a *creatio ex nihilo*, otherwise it would not be creation at all, but production, formation, or something similar.

If we were to read Indic texts from this point of view, we would be understandably led to define the entire Indic conception in "pantheistic" terms. But if we study the texts in their true context and are able to relate them to the environment in which they were conceived, we would have to admit that Indic speculation does not speak of a *creatio ex Deo*, which would indeed be pantheistic, but of a *creatio a Deo*, an expression that is undoubtedly correct for the very reason that Indic thought has its center of gravity not in the physical but in the meta-theological sphere.

It is true that some Indic schools manifest a pantheistic tendency, but this does not occur generally, nor can it be said that the original sense of the main texts supports this tendency. These texts do not claim, in fact, that God brought the world into being by creating it with His own "substance" (*causa materialis*); this statement, on the contrary, must be reversed: it is the world that originated in God, *from* God (even though, secondarily, it appears from the texts that it was created out of love, or out of joyful play, or perhaps also because of an ineluctable will). Creation, considered from the standpoint of the world, is certainly necessary. Without it, the world could not exist.

An overly unilateral accentuation of a *creatio ex nihilo* would, however, break the ontonomy of creation and could give rise to the idea that, once the world has been created from nothing by God, it can exist by itself and on itself. Indic tradition is specifically opposed to this autonomy of creation. The world is always *a Deo*. Though it is now outside nothingness (*extra nihilum*) and though it has emerged from the divine creative act (*extra causam*), it is still constitutively and structurally bound to God. Why? Because the world is not only *ex nihilo* but it exists and continues to exist *a Deo*, and *in Deo* also.

Creation is not contemplated, therefore, as a coming into existence-by-itself, and the creature is not autonomous, though it does not remain *heteronomous* in a servile way. Strictly speaking, the creature is *ontonomous*, not "in itself" but *a Deo*.

The Horizon of Creation in Indic Metaphysics

There can be no doubt that an Indic wisdom exists, or, in other words, that there are several points that are essential to Indic thought with regard to ultimate problems. Nevertheless, India does not possess any theological or strictly philosophical unity. As soon as Indic speculation applies itself to textual sources—even the most universally accepted—it breaks up and the different systems begin to arise.

In India there exist different doctrines of creation, and it is not our task right now to examine them. Here we wish simply to present a few original texts without the intention or pretense of drawing conclusions, but for the sole purpose of obtaining a deep understanding of them (recalling that no form of comprehension can be possible without a preliminary knowledge of the historical and cultural environment in which the documents assembled here were originally compiled).

From which horizon, therefore, do Indic doctrines on creation emerge? While this is by no means an easy question to answer, the following represents our attempt at tracing such a horizon.

a. God and the world are not two independent and self-sufficient elements. The world may be different from God, but it is not independent or separate from Him; at the same time, God does not depend on the world in the same way that the world depends on Him, but in some way even God (co-)depends on the world. God and the world are perhaps two heterogeneous and dissimilar aspects of one single Reality. Alternatively, we might say that the world is appearance and God alone is reality. In any case, "creation" does not refer merely to a part of the relationship, and to be a creature never means resting-in-itself or being-cast-out-of God.

b. From a psychological—and perhaps also epistemological—point of view, in the West we first of all perceive the world and then we reflect on its possible cause. However, according to the Indic conception, or more accurately, the Indic horizon in which the question arises, everything unfolds differently. That is, the creation is primarily regarded as a divine problem and not a cosmic problem. This may in some way be explained by saying that the world is an obvious fact; it exists with or without creation. The world does not need to account for itself or justify itself. This is beyond dispute.

Yet God would not be God *to us* if He were not in some way a Creator. Not only is He responsible for the world, which is His creation, but we are only able to approach God *thanks to* and *through* creation. The world as creation is clearly a problem, but it is predominantly a divine problem. God is precisely the creator of the world. In other words, creation is not a purely cosmological problem; it is above all a theological problem.

c. And it is truly a theological argument in the strictest sense of the word, that is, a problem of revelation. The problem of creation does not arise as a purely philosophical or apologetic question, but as the assertion of the Divine in the face of the world or, as often happens, of Himself. This assertion is only received by means of an act of revelation—whatever one's idea of divinity may be—and thus it is written in the holy books, or impressed in the heart of the prophet or the saint by God's direct illumination.

d. We run the risk, however, of misunderstanding the second and third points if we lose sight of the first. This would be the case if the opposite statement were made, that is, that the problem of creation is of a cosmic or philosophical order. The fact is that we must take the opposite road while maintaining the same perspective. The world does not hint at God or at its primordial cause; at the same time, a God being outside the world could not send us a revelation. It is the world itself, the world in its entirety, that reveals and demonstrates to us its divine structure or its divine principle, the world that shows itself as it truly is—the world, that is, that reveals itself in the revelation. The *śruti* is revelation not because it has been revealed by a God who is outside the world, but because it is not a human work. It is the word that illuminates us from deep within. In other words, it is certainly neither dualism nor pantheism we are dealing with, but rather *advaita* and theophanism. To have a good understanding of the horizon we should define it as "a-theistic" because, in actual fact, there is no God without the world and, likewise, a world without God does not and cannot exist.

e. The forms and expressive modes of the earliest Indic texts must be taken in their mythical or symbolic sense, which also goes along with the general way of thinking of the period in which the texts themselves were conceived. We are not, mind you, dealing here with epistemological (Aristotelian) symbolism, for which a simple analogy would be sufficient, or realistic (Platonic) symbolism, which considers every inferior being as an expression and manifestation of higher orders of being. We are faced here with a special type of symbolism

that deserves our full attention, according to which the only way of expressing sublime realities is offered by the parable, which is typical of myth. Reality, in fact, is not completely either within or beyond our concepts and our thought. Consequently, the concepts we make use of, such as "person," "water," "fire," and so on, are neither pure analogies nor expressive formulas that need to be interpreted. They are myths *cum fundamento in re—atque in verbo*.⁷

f. Descriptions of creation are often characterized and obscured by dialectical antinomies. The Indic mentality is a mixture of purely intellectual and also supra-rational concepts with penetrating ideas of a pure dialectical-logical nature. An intuition is taken as a starting point, and then this same intuition can only find its formulation in paradox. Keen logical assertions are then developed on the basis of such a contradictory proposition. On one hand, for example, God is Being and Non-Being, but on the other hand, how can the world originate from Non-Being? On one hand, Nothingness is pure Non-Being; on the other hand, it is merely existence that is undifferentiated and as yet unformed. God is neither Being nor Non-Being, but on the other hand, He is both Being and Non-Being at the same time. If we are careful never to lose sight of both these elements, we may discover the Indic horizon.

Texts

This selection is not exhaustive and does not examine all the existing perspectives. It will, however, try to grasp the essential issues and outline the problem in general, as far as possible.

We are considering here only the *śruti*, that is, the "inspired books" of Hinduism: the *Vedas* and the *Upaniṣads*. We will leave out the *smṛti*. The texts selected deal exclusively with the ontological problem of creation; we have not included texts of a cosmological and cosmogonic nature.

Our division does not intend to be strictly logical in its arrangement, but seeks merely to follow a certain order and to be of some use in any possible further studies or examination of the texts and the problem.

We have referred to French, German, and English translations in checking our version, and whenever they seemed better than our own we have made extensive use of them.

We have refrained from giving a—however brief—comment on the texts. They are, in fact, quite easily comprehensible to those with a certain knowledge of Indic philosophy.

The Problem

In General

1. I asked the wise men, because I did not know: Who ordered these six worlds in the form of the non-born? Who was the One? (*RV* I.164.6)
2. What is the cause? *Brahman*? Where are we born from? On what do we live? On what base have we been founded (*sampratiṣṭhāḥ*)? By whom are we governed, O theologians (*brama-vidah*), while we live out, in sorrows and pleasures, our vain conditions? (*SU* I.1)
3. I question the outermost (*para*) edge of the earth, I question the seed [the membrum] of the male horse, I question the very heart of every existence; I question the highest (*parama*) firmament (*vyoman*) of the world [or: I inquired about the center of the universe, lifting myself up to the highest heaven, where language resides]. (*AV* IX.10.13)
4. What is the purpose [end, ground, mode: *gati*] of this world? (*CU* I.9.1)

⁷ Grounded in reality itself—and in language.

Atmospheres

5. That is full, this is full [fullness, completeness: *pūrṇam*]. From fullness proceeds fullness. If from fullness we take away fullness, yet fullness remains. (*BU V.1*; Introduction to *IsU*; cf. *AV X.8.29*)
6. Not from the word (*vācā*), not from the intellect (*manasā*), not from sight (*cakṣuṣā*) can He be understood. And how ever could He be understood, except by the one who says, "He is"? (*KathU II.3.12*; see text no. 50)
7. When He is understood as "He is," His real nature [His specific being: *tattva-bhāva*] shows itself. (*KathU II.3.13*)
8. In the beginning there was only the *ātman* in the form of a person (*puruṣa*). Looking around him, he saw none other but himself. He said above all: "I am." From here arose the name "I." (*BU I.14.1*; see text no. 79)
9. Everything that moves in this moving world is encompassed [surrounded] by God (*Īśavasyam*). (*IU I.1*)
10. "How does this come to be . . . ? How can it be that . . . ?" [see text no. 71] Then He [Yājñavalkya] said, "O Gārgī, do not ask too much or you will end up losing your head. In truth, you ask too much about a deity [Brahmā] about which other questions should not be asked. O Gārgī, do not ask too many questions." At this point, Gārgī, the daughter of Vācaknu, left Him in peace. (*BU III.6.1*)

The Vedas: Mythological Themes

The Hymn of Creation

11. Then was there neither the non-existent [non-being: *a-sat*], nor was there the existent [being: *sat*—nothing that existed or did not exist]. The air did not exist, nor did the sky, which lies beyond. What were the contents, and where? Who kept them? Was [the primordial] water there, unfathomable and deep? (*RV X.129.1*)
12. Then was there no death, nor immortality. There was no trace of day and of night. That One [*tad-ekam*, the only one] breathed without breath, of His own power (*svadhyā*). Outside of this, nothing else existed! (*RV X.129.2*)
13. Darkness, at first, was concealed by darkness. Indistinct, all was water. The primordial being [primordial power, the first essence: *ā-bhu*] was covered by void, this One (*tad-ekam*) arose [was born] from the power of heat [creative fire, asceticism, effort, concentration: *tapas*]. (*RV X.129.3*)
14. At first there developed desire [longing, craving, love: *kāma*], which was the germ of the mind [spirit, intellect: *manas*]. The sages, searching their hearts wisely, found the bond [relationship: *bandhu*] of the existent [being] in the non-existent [non-being]. (*RV X.129.4*)
15. The cord was stretched obliquely; what was above it, and what below it? There were bearers of seed, there were powers; below was energy and above impulse [will (?): *prayati*]. (*RV X.129.5*)
16. Who truly knows? Who can here declare where this creation was born [produced] and whence it comes? The Gods are beyond the creation (*visarjanena*) of this (*asyā*) [universe]. Who then knows whence it came into being? (*RV X.129.6*)
17. Whence came this creation and whether it was made or not, He alone, who sees in the highest heaven, knows; or perhaps He does not know? (*RV X.129.7*)

The Cosmogonic Hymn

18. In the beginning there was a golden embryo (*hiranyagarbha*). . . . Ever since its birth it was the only lord of creation. It established the heaven and the earth. Whom shall we worship as the God of our sacrifice? (*RV* X.121.1; see text no. 58)
19. He who gives breath, He who gives strength and whose command even the Gods obey, He whose shadow is immortality, He from whom comes death. Whom shall we worship . . . ? (*RV* X.121.2)
20. He who with his might rules over the moving world as the only lord, ruling over those who breathe and those who sleep, over men [two-footed creatures] and animals [quadrupeds]. Whom shall we worship . . . ? (*RV* X.121.3)
21. He through whom the heaven is terrible [strong] and the earth solid [was established for the first time], thanks to whom the light and the vault of the sky were established, who has measured the air in the spaces. Whom shall we worship . . . ? (*RV* X.121.5)
22. When the great waters came everywhere, bringing the embryo, and generating fire (*agni*), then was there the sole life [breath, soul, spirit] of the Gods (*devānām*). Whom shall we worship . . . ? (*RV* X.121.7)
23. He who in his greatness cast his eyes over the mighty waters and generated the sacrifice, he who alone is God among all Gods (*devenṣu adhi deva ekaḥ*). Whom shall we worship . . . ? (*RV* X.121.8).
24. May He not hurt us, He who has generated the heaven and the earth, He whose laws (*satyadharmā*) are eternal, He who created the sparkling waters. Whom shall we worship . . . ? (*RV* X.121.9)
25. O Prajāpati [Lord of creatures]! You alone embrace all these created things! Whatever be the desire for which we beseech you, grant that we may become lords of abundant wealth. (*RV* X.121.10)

God the Creator

26. A thousand heads had *Puruṣa* [the Person], a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. Covering the earth on every side, He stretched beyond it for a length of ten fingers. (*RV* X.90.1)
27. *Puruṣa* is all this: all that has been and all that will be. He is the Lord of immortality, which waxes greater still by food. (*RV* X.90.2)
28. So mighty is His greatness, and greater than this is *Puruṣa*. All beings are one fourth of Him. All the immortal in heaven are three fourths of Him. (*RV* X.90.3)
29. *Puruṣa* with three fourths rose up; one fourth of Him remained down here. Thence He went out in every direction toward the things that eat and those that do not eat. (*RV* X.90.4)
30. From him Virāj [the Bright One] was born, and from Virāj was born *Puruṣa*. As soon as He was born, He stretched out beyond the earth, both backward and forward. (*RV* X.90.5)
31. When the Gods performed the sacrifice with *Puruṣa* as their oblation, spring was its melted butter, summer its fuel, autumn its offering. (*RV* X.90.6)
32. *Ṛṣi*, the *Hotṛ*, our Father, in offering all these worlds, has taken His seed, desiring wealth through pious blessings; He, the first inventor, has entered the inferior [beings]. (*RV* X.81.1; X.6.13.1)

33. What was the position? What the material? How was it [made]? In such a way that the sustainer of all, Viśvakarman, begot and opened the heaven with his might. (*RV*X.81.2)
34. Having eyes everywhere and everywhere a face and arms and legs, He crosses the heaven with his arms, [the earth] with the quick movement [of his feet] and exists as a peerless God who begets the heaven and the earth. (*RV*X.81.3)
35. What is the forest, what is the tree from which heaven and earth were fashioned? Inquire, sages, within your minds what [place] He chose on which to establish the worlds. (*RV*X.81.4)
36. Let us proclaim with gentle voice the generations of the Gods [the divine company], as they, once their prayers are recited, regard [the worshiper with indulgent eye] in this last age. (*RV*X.72.1; X.6.4.1)
37. Brāhmaṇaspati has welded together these [generations of Gods] with His breath in the very manner of a smith [with his bellows]; in the primordial age of the Gods the existent was born of the non-existent (*asataḥ sad ajāyata*). (*RV*X.72.2)
38. In the primitive age of the gods the existent was born of the non-existent and subsequently were born the four parts (of the horizon) and then (the trees) that grow tall (*RV*X.72.3)
39. The earth was born of what [that is, the tree which] rises up high, the four cardinal points of the earth, *Dakṣa* was born of *Aditi* and, later, *Aditi* of *Dakṣa*. (*RV*X.72.4)
40. He who created the senses, resolute in His mind, generated the water [and then] these two [elements: heaven and earth] floating [on the waters], and when these ancient boundaries were established, then the heaven and the earth expanded. (*RV*X.82.1)
41. Viśvaharman, with His vast mind and multiform greatness, is He who pervades all, the creator, revenger, and supreme supervisor, in whom the desires of their [senses] are satisfied with food. They call [Him] Supreme, beyond the seven *ṛṣis*. (*RV*X.82.2)
42. He who is our preserver, our father, the creator [of all], who knows our dwelling-places [and knows] all beings, who has given the Gods their names—He is one. The other beings go and consult Him (*RV*X.82.3)
43. Who is that embryo that was beyond the heaven, beyond this earth, beyond the Gods, beyond the *asuras*, that was first held in the waters, in which all the Gods contemplated each other? (*RV*X.82.5)
44. Truly the waters first held the embryo, in which all the Gods were united: one, deposited in the navel of the Non-born [Creator], in which all beings dwell. (*RV*X.82.6)
45. You [all] do not know He who has generated these [beings]; [His life] is other, different from yours, from you who are shrouded in mist. Foolishly speak, those who wander, [who are] greedy and occupied with worship. (*RV*X.82.7)
46. Truth [of thought] and exactitude [of speech] were born of arduous penitence; hence was generated power, hence also the ocean full of water. (*RV*X.190.1; X.12.40.1)
47. From the ocean full of water the year was then produced, which ordained the days and the nights, ordainer of every moment. (*RV*X.190.2)
48. Dhātṛ in the beginning created the sun and the moon, the heaven, the earth, the firmament and the happy [sky]. (*RV*X.190.3)
49. In the beginning this world was water, ocean. The Lord of creation walked among them [the primordial waters] in the form of the wind. He then stared at this [earth]. He took the form of a bear and seized the earth. He then became the Creator and all things and dried [the earth]. He expanded and became land. This is the exten-

sion of the earth. Upon it He did penitence. Only then did He make the Gods, the *Vasus*, *Rudras*, and *Adityas* appear. (TS VII.1.5.1)

50. You are that (*tat tvam asi*). (CU VI.8.7)

The Upaniṣads: The Metaphysical Element

The One and the Many

51. In the beginning, my dear, there was nothing other than being (*sat*), this alone without a second (*ekam evāditīyam*). Others say, "In the beginning there was only non-being (*a-sat*), this alone and without a second. From this non-being, being was produced." (CU VI.2.1)
52. But, in truth, my dear, how ever could this be? How can being be produced from non-being? No, my dear, in the beginning this (*idam*) being was alone, alone and without a second (CU VI.2.2)
53. In that time this [universe] was undifferentiated [unsaid, non-revealed, *avyākṛtam*]. It became differentiated by very merit of the name (*nāma*) and the form (*rūpa*). (BU I.4.7)
54. The One, controller [of all], the innermost *ātman* of all things, He who makes His one form into many . . . (Kath U II.2.12; cf. SU VI.12)
55. The *ātman*, truly it was this one alone in the beginning. There was no other thing that blinked.⁸ He thought, "Now let me create the world!" (AU I.1.1)
56. From Him (*Puruṣa*) the Gods also were produced in multiple ways. (MundU II.1.7)

Non-Being

57. In the beginning, truly this [world] was non-existent [or: non-being (*a-sat*) was this at the beginning]. From this, in truth, being (*sat*) was produced. It made of itself (*svayam akuruta*) an *ātman*. For this reason it is called "well-made" (*su-kṛta*). (TU II.7; cf. text no. 52)
58. The sun is *brahman*: this is the doctrine. Here is a further explanation: in the beginning this [world] was only non-being [non-existent, *a-sat*: *asat evadam agra āsīt*]. It became existent [*tat sad āsīt*: truly existent?]. It evolved, it transformed itself into an egg (CU III.19.1; cf. text no. 18)
59. He who knows *brahman* as non-existent, non-existent (*a-sat*) he himself becomes. He who knows that *brahman* exists, knows inasmuch as he himself exists [he thus becomes existent]. (TU II.6)
60. In the beginning there was nothing here. This world was covered with death, with hunger, since hunger is death. So He created the mind [*logos*, spirit: *manas*]. (BU I.2)
61. From the non-existent came the *manas*. (TU II.2.9.10)
62. In the non-existent the existent was consolidated; in the existent, being (*bhūta*) was consolidated; being is founded on that which will come into being; what will come into being is consolidated in being. (AV XVII.1.19)

"He Who Embraces All Things"

63. There are, in fact, two forms of *brahman*: the one with form and the one without form, the mortal and the immortal, the stationary and the moving, this real one [existent, being: *sat*] and that over there [*sac-ca tyac-ca*: that which is beyond, the

⁸ Some translate this as "flashed."

- transcendent?]. (*BU* II.3.1)
64. Thus he spoke: "What then was there?" He [Brahmā] told him [Subāla]: "There *was* neither being nor non-being. Besides, there *was not* being or non-being. From this emerged darkness." (*SU* I.1; cf. also II.1)
 65. When there is [there was] neither the darkness nor day nor night, nor being nor non-being, one alone (*śiva eva kevalaḥ*) is [was], the Blessed One [benevolent, of good omen]. (*SU* IV.18)
 66. Verily, in the beginning this [world] was, so to speak, neither non-existent nor existent; verily, in the beginning this [universe], so to speak, existed and did not exist: then there was only that Mind. (*SB* X.5.3.1)
 67. Thus was it said by the *Rṣi* [in *RV* X.129.1]: "There is neither the non-existent nor the existent" since the mind was not, so to speak, either existent or non-existent. (*SB* X.5.3.2)
 68. I am immortality and also death; being and non-being, O Arjuna! (*BG* IX.19)
 69. I will describe that which must be known, but [only] that which must be known and that which, once known, will lead to immortality: the supreme *brahman* without beginning, which is considered neither being nor non-being (*na sat tan nasāt*). (*BG* XIII.12)

The Meta-Cosmological Element

The Foundation

70. *Viśva* [the Whole] you are, Vaiśvānara [fire, the all-penetrating, belonging to every Man]. Everything that is born is sustained by you. Let every oblation enter you. The creatures live where you, the all-immortal, are. (*MaitU* VI.9)
71. Then Gārgī, the daughter of Vacaknu, asked him: "Yājñavalkya!", she said, "since all this [world] is woven, in warp and weft, on water, on what then, I ask you, is water woven, in warp and weft?" "On the wind, O Gārgī." "And on what then, I ask you, is the wind woven, in warp and weft?" "On the celestial worlds, O Gārgī" ... [and the discussion continues, going through the worlds of Gandharva, the sun, moon, constellations, Gods, Indra, Prajāpati, and finally, the world of Brahmā. At this point our text no. 10 follows.] (*BU* III.6.1; cf. also III.9.26)
72. And what could its root be but food? And in the same manner, my dear, from that germ which is food, trace back to its root, which is water; from the germ that is water, trace back to its root, which is heat (*tejas*); from the germ that is heat, trace back to its root, which is Being (*sat*). All these creatures, my dear, have their root in Being; they have Being as their home [abode, dwelling place: *sad-āyatanāḥ*], they have Being as their support (*sat-pratiṣṭāḥ*) (*CU* VI.8.4)
73. Manifest [yet] hidden, moving in the secret space, in the great abode. Therein is placed everything that moves, breathes and blinks [cf. *RV* X.121.3; *AV* X.8.6]. Whatever it is, know it as being (*sad* and non-being (*a-sad*) [cf. *SU* IV.18], as supreme object of desire, higher than comprehension, as that which is finest in creatures. (*MU* II.2.1)
74. The Gods spoke, saying, "Verily, there exists no other foundation than this: let us return Him to his place; our father Prajāpati, He will be our foundation." (*SB* VII.1.2.2)

In the Beginning

75. You are the without-beginning (*anādimat tvam*), you abide in omnipresence, you from whom all beings are born. (*SU* IV.4; cf. also IV.10)
76. He who is without beginning and without end [with no second], in the midst of chaos, the creator of all, who has many forms and who alone embraces the universe. Whoever knows God (*deva*) is freed from all chains. (*SU* V.13)
77. He is the beginning, the efficient cause of combinations. He must be considered as beyond the tri-temporality [present, past, and future: *trikāla*], without parts (*a-kāla*). Let us worship Him first of all as the One with many forms, as the origin of all beings, the adorable God who lives within our own thoughts. (*SU* VI.5)
78. If it has been said, now [that it is not possible] for lack of all distinction in the work [before creation]. No, since [the world] was without beginning. (*BS* II.1.35)
79. In the beginning there was truly one sole *ātman*. No other blinked. He thought, "Let me now create the worlds." (*AU* I.1.1; cf. text no. 8)
80. He created the worlds, the heavenly water, the rays of light, death and the waters. (*AU* I.1.2)

In God

81. As the mighty wind, that always and everywhere moves, inhabits the spaces (*ākāśa*), in the same manner—mark well—all beings rest in Him. (*BG* IX.6)
82. [He is] the One who governs every single spring, [the One] in which everything is dissolved and gathered. (*SU* IV.11)
83. In Him [or rather, in it: *brahman*] all the worlds rest, and none ever go beyond Him. (*KathU* II.3.1)
84. He in which all this world is ever-enveloped, the knower, the Author of time, the possessor of qualities and omniscience. (*SU* VI.2)
85. He knew, and said, "I, verily, am this creation because all this I myself produced." Henceforth came into being the creation. Truly he who knows this [fact] comes to be in this creation of His. (*BU* I.4.5)
86. All this is truly his creation, and He himself is all the Gods. (*BU* I.4.6)
87. From Him all proceeds [is born: *jātam*], in Him all rests [exists, subsists: *pratiṣṭhitam*] and to Him all returns. I am that *brahman*, with no second. (*KaivU*, 19)
88. He is indeed the God who pervades all regions. He was born before time [the firstborn: *pūrvo ha jātaḥ*] and lies yet within the womb. He has been born and He will be born; He stands on the other side of all creatures, yet his face looks in every direction. (*SU* II.16)
89. [To] that God who is in the fire, who is in the water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the planets and the trees, adoration be to this God, adoration! (*SU* II.17)
90. Fire is His head, His eyes are the sun and the moon; the regions of space are His ears, His word the *Vedas* of revelation, the wind His breath [life: *prāṇa*] and His heart the whole universe; from His feet the earth [was born]. Indeed, He is the inner *ātman* of all beings (*sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā*). (*MundU* II.1.4)
91. And whatever is the seed of all beings, that am I O Arjuna. There is nothing, in motion or motionless, that can exist without me. (*BG* X.39)
92. All this universe pervaded by me through my un-manifest form (*avyakta-mūrtina*). All beings dwell in me, but I do not dwell in them. (*BG* IX.4; cf. also VII.12)

93. And [yet] the beings do not abide within me. Behold my divine *yoga* [mystery, power]! My *ātman*, though it gives life and supports all beings, does not dwell within them. (*BG IX.5*)
94. The one God who is hidden in all creatures, all-pervading, the inner *ātman* of all beings (*sarva-bhūtāntar-ātmā*), He who watches over every action (*karman*), who dwells within every being, the witness, the omniscient, the only One, free from qualities. (*SU VI.11*)

That Which Proceeds from God

95. As a spider descends (*ud-car*) with his thread, as the tiny sparks are released (*vyuccaranti*, from *vi-ud-car*) from fire, so from this *ātman* proceed (*vyuccaranti*) all breaths [vital energies: *prāṇaḥ*], all worlds, all beings (*bhūtani*). His secret meaning (*upaniṣad*) is the truth of truths [the real of the real, the being of the real: *satyasya satyam*]. Vital energies [breaths: *prāṇaḥ*] are the truth, and He [it, *ātman*] is their truth. (*BU II.1.20*; cf. *MaitU VI.32* and *MundU I.1.7*; *SU VI.10*)
96. His name is the real of the real [the truth of the truth]. (*BU II.3.6*)
97. This is the truth. As from a raging fire sparks are released in its own form (*prabhavante*), so in the same manner, my dear, the many beings are born [produced: *prajāyante*] of the Everlasting, and return to Him. (*MundU II.1.1*)
98. I am the guardian of all, from me all things proceed. The sages, knowing this, venerate me with upright conscience. (*BG X.8*)

Outside of God

99. He moves and does not move. He is far and He is near. He is inside all this and He is outside all this. (*IsU, 5*)
100. As fire which, though one, as soon as it enters this world adapts to every form, so the inner *ātman* of all beings (*sarva-bhūtāntar-ātman*) is enveloped in every form while remaining outside (*bahis*). (*KathU II.2.9*; cf. also vv. 10–11)
101. He who, though he lives on the earth, yet is different [*antara*, that means also “within”] from the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body is the earth, who sustains the earth from within, this is the *ātman*, the inner sustainer, the immortal. (*BU III.7.3*)
102. O Lord of creation, you are the primordial protector, the Father of the Gods, the producer of all creatures, the Lord of all life, the transcendent protector. (*TB II.8.1.3*)

Toward God

103. In Him [God, *deva*], in the beginning and in the end, the universe is hidden [or: its end and its beginning—all is dissolved]. (*SU IV.1*; cf. text no. 82)
104. In the dissolution of the world, He alone remains awake. From the space He surely awakens this world, which only consists of thought. In Him it is meditated and in Him it is dissolved. (*MaitU VI.17*)
105. All beings, O son of Kuntī [Arjuna], return to him, *Prakṛti* [Nature], at the end of a cosmic period (*kalpa*), and at the beginning of a *kalpa* I generate them. (*BG IX.7*)

The Meta-Psychological Element

Through Logos

106. And this also is *brahmaṇaspati*. The word [language: *vāc*] is *brahman*. He is its lord. Therefore this is *brahmaṇaspati*. (*BU* I.3.21)
107. By that speech and that soul of his He created all this [universe] and whatsoever is in it. (*SB* X.6.5.5)
108. Verily Prajāpati [the Lord of creatures] in the beginning was alone. He was not happy, alone. Then, meditating on himself [*ātmānam*: pondering over his own thoughts in himself] He created numerous creatures. (*MaitU* II.6)
109. But Prajāpati is word, and that doubtless is the supreme language which is [the outcome] of seventeen drums: He, the supreme Prajāpati, He who wins the supreme language. (*SB* V.1.5.6)
110. I do not know clearly if I am all this, for I wander perplexed and fettered, confused of mind. When the first-born [perceptions] of truth reach me, then immediately I will receive a part [of the meaning] of that [saved] word. (*RV* I.164.37; I.22.8.37)
111. I turned around the earth and the heaven, and I approached (*upasthā*) the first-born Son of justice [order: *ṛta*]. (*AV* II.1.4)
112. [In the beginning] Prajāpati alone was the whole universe, *vāc* was at his side. *vāc* was his second. He reflected, "I will release this *vāc* [so that] it might produce and fulfill all this [all the world, the universe]." (*TMB* XX.14.2)
113. *Brahman* has understanding [knowledge, *vijñāna*]. Since, in truth, beings are born of understanding: once they are born, they live because of understanding and into understanding they enter when they pass away. (*TU* III.5)
114. That which all the *Vedas* proclaim, that which all the ascetics (*tapas*) declare, for desire of which Man lives a life of religious novitiate [apprenticeship: *brahmachārya*], that word I tell you briefly. It is *Aum*. (*KathU* I.2.15)
115. This syllable [*Aum*] is truly *Brahmā* [eternal spirit, sacred word]. This syllable is truly the supreme one [or: the highest destination]. (*KathU* I.16)
116. The word (*vāc*) is *brahman*, and He is its lord. (*BU* I.3.21)
117. With this word . . . He produced all that exists. (*BU* I.2.5)

By the Will

118. For the self-existent (*svayambhū*), after fulfilling all penances, created, in the beginning, from his own mouth. (*Manu* I.94)
119. Truly, all these things are centered on the will [decision, intention, conception: *saṃkalpa*]. In the will all these things have their *ātman* (*saṃkalpa-ātmakāni*). In the will they were established [have their inhabitation, were founded: *pratiṣṭhītāni*]. By the will were formed the heaven and the earth, air, ether, water, and land. (*CU* VII.4.2)
120. The *ātman* wished, "May I be many! Let me procreate myself." He performed penance. And after having performed penance, he created all these things, all that exists here on earth. And after he created them, he entered truly into them. (*TU* II.6; cf. *AV* V.32)
121. In the beginning, this [world] was only the *ātman*, one alone. He wished (*akāmayata*), "If only I had a bride! Then I could procreate. If I had wealth, then I could offer

sacrifices and perform rites, carry out a deed (*karman*).” This, in truth, is [the sphere of] desire (*kāma*). Even if one were to desire more than this, he could not have it. (*BU* I.4.17; cf. *PrasnU*, I.4)

122. I am the father of this world, the mother, the bearer, the ancestor (*pitāmaha*), I am he who must be known, the purifier (*pavitra*), the *Aum* (*auṃkāra*), the *Rg*, the *Sāman*, and the *Yajus* [-*veda*]. (*BG* IX.17)

THE FOUNDATION OF HERMENEUTIC PLURALISM IN HINDUISM

Preliminary Remarks

The Paradoxical Datum

Hinduism shows a peaceful co-existence between beliefs that are widely different from the point of view of doctrine. An atheist, a materialist, and a monist, but also a *bhakta*, an *advaitin*, and a *viśdvaitin*, can all equally be Hindū. There are six systems of philosophy, the six classic *darśanas*: *samkhya*, *yoga*, *vaiśeṣika*, *nyaya*, *pūrvamīmāṃsā*, and *uttaramīmāṃsā*, or *vedānta*. Each system claims to be complete in itself and rejects any other perspective. Only the *vedānta* has sought to establish a degree of compromise, while all the others (as far as is possible for a philosophical system) consider themselves exclusive. Nevertheless, all these systems have, so to speak, their own identity card within Hinduism.

The Hindū religion, therefore, is characterized by the paradoxical fact—at least with regard to a certain mentality—that it is possible to be a Hindū and yet hold the most varied opinions. No one would deny the different systems of philosophy (not even religious systems such as Śivaism and Viṣṇuism) their right to define themselves as Hindū. Among all these systems there reigns a totally peaceful co-existence.

Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

Is the error to be found, then, in Hinduism? Does Hinduism entail the idea of heterodoxy? Yes, without a doubt. The philosophical treatises in India state that there are six orthodox schools of thought, and the others are non-orthodox. The orthodox schools are called *astika* (from *asti*, the root of the verb *to be*); the heterodox schools are *nastika*. The former say “yes,” the latter, “no.” It is a question, in fact, of acceptance or rejection. But of what? Of a doctrine? Certainly not, considering the jungle of doctrinal pluralism that is so daunting to a logical mentality. . . . It is simply a matter of rejection or acceptance of the authority of the *Vedas*—authority, not doctrine; existential value, not essential content. Orthodoxy (and, likewise, heterodoxy) is bound, *primo et per se*, not to an idea or an intellectual conviction, but to a more complete and indiscriminate faithfulness, to the existence of an authority in the *Vedas*.

I could give modern examples of what is known as the Indic syncretism of a Ramakrishna, that is, a Man who allows himself to try different doctrines, different faiths, to share in the experience of Christians, Muslims, and Hindūs, believing himself in each case to be, in equally good faith, Christian, Muslim, or Hindū. The syncretism of Gandhi or the philosopher Radhakrishna are other examples of the paradoxical fact of the co-existence, in Hinduism, of different schools of thought, doctrines, and paths, all of which have a right, so to speak, to their own orthodox identity card. I recall what happened during the persecution of the early Christians, who were told, “Believe what you want, but sacrifice to

the Gods! We do not force you to betray your beliefs, but sacrifice to the Gods!" In fact, one thing that completely transcends thought is the act of sacrificing to the Gods. Such an act does not belong to the order of thought, but that of being, of *being-with* (God and people) and "You do not have the right to excommunicate us from *being*." From an orthodox point of view, a Christian may at times be tempted to yield to his persecutors, but never from the point of view of orthopraxis.

Hinduism

Hinduism Is Not an Essence

It is not possible to define Hinduism, as it would seem fitting from a logical viewpoint. At the same time, however, we run a great risk of misunderstanding it, if we assume a starting point that does not correspond to the reality of things. This misunderstanding is deeply rooted in the attempt to apply to Hinduism categories that are not its own and that alter the meaning of the question right from the beginning.¹ Hinduism is attributed with a certain concept of religion, a certain formal *eidos*, which does not actually belong to it and, consequently, gives rise to a series of pseudo-problems. To outline this in a brief compendium (a compendium spanning forty centuries and involving hundreds of schools and paths of salvation!), I will begin by explaining what Hinduism is not.

Hinduism is not an essence; it is not a doctrine. Hinduism does not even have a name (no Hindū would call himself Hindū; it is the others, the Christians and the Muslims, who distinguish Hindūs by calling them so). Hinduism does not want to be placed within a category. It has no content, it is not an idea—consequently, it does not need to be a consistent idea. A suitable predicate cannot be given to this subject, that may be capable of providing Hinduism with content. Hinduism, therefore, is neither an essence nor a doctrine. It has no founder, no origin, and no limits, and because of this it eludes all "de-finitions." Hence, Hinduism has no dogmas in the strict sense of the word.²

The primacy of the principle of identity over the principle of non-contradiction. We might formulate the following theory: while the development of the Western thought and culture in general is based on the principle of non-contradiction, in the development of the Indic culture it is the principle of identity that dominates. Naturally, this does not mean that the principle of identity is not recognized and applied in the West, or that the principle of non-contradiction is unknown in India. I am, of course, speaking according to an *esprit de finesse* and not an *esprit de géométrie*. Indeed, I believe that, from the Greeks onward, Western culture is based on the principle of non-contradiction, on the idea that no being can *be* and *not-be* at the same time. Note, however, this "at the same time" (a qualification without which the principle of non-contradiction would not exist), since it is clear that, if this sort of principle of identity is lacking within the principle of contradiction, then a being can both *be* and *not-be*. Project the sequence of the two moments of such a "being" out of time, and you will begin to approach the Indic mentality.

The primacy of the principle of non-contradiction implies the individualization of

¹ Cf. Panikkar, "La demitologizzazione nell'incontro tra cristianesimo e induismo," in *Il problema della demitizzazione* (Quaderni dell'Archivio di Filosofia, 1961). It will be in vol. VII of *Opera Omnia*.

² "Belief [in Hinduism] is the pursuit of experience, rather than adhesion to a dogma or a defined revelation," according to P. Fallon, "Quelle est l'orientation actuelle de l'Hindouisme?" *Ecclesia* 6, no. 75 (1955): 53.

beings, but also their isolation. Every being in the West is alone, condemned to be itself and not another. By virtue of the principle of non-contradiction, it is unchangeable, non-transferable, unique. Consequently, all being is limited by its opposite: "A" is limited by "Non-A," by that which contradicts it. Only in this way is it possible for the West to make its own thought work, because without limits, without frontiers, no thought is possible, since it would simply be thrown into indiscrimination. In order to be able to think, our intellect must proceed by putting together and dividing—*componendo et dividendo*, as Thomas Aquinas would say.

Human thought has placed itself, against error and interfusions, under the protection of the principle of non-contradiction. To do this, however, it has had to pay a high price: the exclusion of the sphere of the Infinite, of Being that has no boundaries and no authority above itself. The Supreme Being is not subjugated to any principle of non-contradiction, otherwise it would not be infinite. The principle of non-contradiction is relevant only to us; to the Supreme Being it is neither relevant nor irrelevant. This does not mean, however, that the realm of the infinite is ruled by contradiction, but that it is no longer ruled by non-contradiction. Such a principle is valid for us, and when human "reason" tries to apply it to the great problems of the infinite (Being and beings, eternity and time, God and the world, etc.), it falls prey to antinomy, of which Western culture can provide abundant samples.

The Indic culture, on the other hand, rests entirely on the principle of identity. The whole Indic culture is a passionate quest for the principle of identity, for the "A" that may be identical to "A." What is the predicate P that can truly be identical to the subject S? In the world there is no single predicate P that can fulfill the subject, be truly equal to S, the subject. Not even the personal subject can do this; when we say, "I am me," in fact, this personal subject is not a perfect identity. I am neither my body, nor my soul, nor my spirit. I cannot say what I am in a way that fully expresses the complete reality of myself. Ultimately, "I" cannot be totally identified with "me," because I am not an "I" (but merely a "me"). There is no "self" that is identical to itself, except for the Absolute (in Indic terms, the *ātman-brahman* identity, but then the *ātman* is no longer my "me"). Only in the Supreme Being are essence and existence (to use Scholastic terms) the same thing.

In this case, then, the price that India has to pay is not so great: the discursive thought cannot be extended this far, and the law of *aut-aut* thinking (principle of non-contradiction) no longer belongs to this sphere of the infinite *et-et*. And when this method is applied to worldly things, then we discover the weakness and inadequacy of a thought that struggles to find an ultimate and absolute difference between God and the world, the soul and the body, good and evil, or one religion (path, doctrine) and another.

Such a difference (which I endeavor to emphasize, though in a way that is totally Western; the capacity to adapt, in fact, is also Eastern) leads to a twofold development along the parallel and, at times, diverging lines of the two cultures. Later I will give a concrete example of this.³

Hinduism Is an Existence

We have said that Hinduism is neither an essence, nor a doctrine, nor an idea. It is, in actual fact, what is left when all these have been excluded. From this ineffable, uncrystallized remainder do convictions, ideas, and systems originate. This is the foundation that supports

³ It would be interesting to carry out a study on the dialectics of the opposites in Indic thought (for example, light and shadow in *Kath U* III.1; VI.5; life and death in *RV.X*.121.2; etc.) and compare it with the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the Christian tradition.

and enables posterior concretization and embodiments in the different forms of philosophy, worship, and so on. If Christianity were able to declare and testify to, but also to realize and offer, its Incarnation without limiting or offending universality, and if the "catholic" spontaneity of Hinduism could even present itself as the tangible, but also universal and cosmic, solution, then dialogue—that is, true conversion—would begin to move closer toward a genuine and decisive mutual exchange.

To express myself in Western terms, I would say that Hinduism is more an *ek-sistence*, a container that can be filled with any kind of content. It is—it wants to be—Reality itself rather than the knowledge of this Reality. It is *the* truth understood as existential truth, and not *a* truth or knowledge of truth, which would imply a limitation and an interpretation (and here we come to our central theme) of the truth. I would say that Hinduism is a disembodied truth; a truth on the verge of becoming incarnate, I would add as a Christian and a Hindū. If something is truth (as the sacred books and present-day orthodox Hindūs repeatedly claim, and this was the guiding idea of Gandhi from an intellectual point of view), by rights this truth belongs to Hinduism. It is clearly not truth as conformity,⁴ but truth as reality.

Hinduism, therefore, should be understood as *sanātana-dharma*, as a type of eternal and permanent reality, truth, substance, religion, morality, way (the term *dharma* implies all this and more). Hinduism professes to be this main riverbed, this raw material, this universal base, this pre-essential existence, and so on, that allows it to assume a thousand different forms and be fecundated by different principles. The Indic concept of *brahman* itself, in relation to the current concept of God in Western philosophy, demonstrates this tension and complementarity.⁵ Hinduism is the existential coefficient of the whole individual in the face of his *karman*. It demands to be considered as the ontic place of growth of Man up until his fullness. Hinduism *is-not*, it *exists* in people, those at least who in India do not deny it.

Hermeneutics

The hermeneutics of Hinduism is twofold: in classic terms, *karma-vāda*, the hermeneutics of *karma* (the root *kr* means "to do"), and *artha-vāda*, based on the meaning of the commandments.

Karma-vāda

The first method, *karma-vāda*, is, then, the hermeneutics of action, of the act. This first hermeneutics is concerned not with interpreting, but with achieving; not with knowing, but doing. It is not a question of doctrinally interpreting, but of essentially starting off on the way to salvation. It is not about content, but about *élan*. It is the pre-eminence of action and the act over any kind of ulterior reflection.

Some time ago, a Hindū leader told me, "No one can live without faith." This faith without which no one can live is Hinduism. What is essential, therefore, is not believing *within* or *in* something, but belief in itself, the very fact of believing, without an object. No predicate or object is adequate to the act of believing. We think something, we think *about*

⁴ In the Aristotelian/Scholastic sense of *adaequatio rei et intellectus* (conformity between reality and the concept).

⁵ Cf. my "Das Brahman der Upanisaden und der Gott der Philosophen," in *Kairos* 3–4 (1961; Salzburg): 182.

or *within* something. With good reason can we declare "*cogito cogitatum*."⁶ In Hinduism, however, it is not possible to say *credo creditum*. What is essential, essentially essential, to the act of believing is believing itself. The object of faith can help us to speak about faith, to classify it, and also to verify that it is genuine faith. But, strictly speaking, faith has no object, *ob-jectum*, launched, projected before it, for the very fact that, paradoxically, faith is not subjective.

Karma-vāda faith, therefore, is naked faith, a faith without content, a pure opening up to transcendence, the acceptance of an *outside*, an *above*, and a *below*. Hinduism is more *ortho-praxis*, orthopraxy, than *ortho-doxia*, orthodoxy.⁷

Orthopraxy. Orthopraxy applies also to Christianity, although the development of the Western and Christian culture has caused it to be overlooked all too often. Christianity is much more an *action* through which we carry out our own salvation than a *doctrine* in which we believe. It is by means of an action that we achieve the goal, *mokṣa*, liberation.

The ultimate purpose of religion and the Scriptures, therefore, is not the teaching but salvation. Religion is a way (*mārga*) of salvation, not a philosophy, a way of knowledge. It is not about knowing. The left hand should not know what the right hand is doing (Mt 6:3) and those whom Christ saves do not even know it (Mt 15:37). It is about coming into *being*.

In India the expression "non-practicing Catholic" is scandalous, incomprehensible. If you are a Catholic, it means you are a practicing one. Being Catholic does not mean having a doctrine, accepting something as true. If you are Catholic, it means that you are building your salvation by this way, this *mārga*. It is beyond understanding, therefore, how there can be any sense in the concept of "non-practicing Catholic." To be "a Catholic" means to believe in the truth of Christianity (orthodoxy) and "non-practicing" means that it is not considered necessary to put this into practice (orthopraxy). Religion, however, *is* praxis, orthopraxy much more than orthodoxy, and the latter only makes sense when it is integrated with the former.

Thus, Hinduism is an *ergon*, a liturgy, a way, an action, rather than a philosophy or a theology. It is about *doing* one's salvation—which is not so far removed from Christianity. In the Gospel of St. John we find in fact the expression "to do truth" ("He who does truth comes to the light" [3:21]).

In the Bible of Jerusalem this expression (which corresponds, nevertheless, to the original Greek) is considered too strong and is translated as "to act inside truth." This is not the only place, however, that St. John uses such an expression, which, after all, is not that exclusive (cf. Ep 4:15). Expressions that refer to orthopraxy abound in his *Gospel* and *Letters*; for example, "to walk in truth" (2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 4); "to sanctify oneself in truth" (Jn 17:17); "to be in the truth" (cf. 2 Jn 2); "the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32); "to be fellow helpers to the truth" (3 Jn 8). The content of this truth is not logic; it is not of an intellectual order: "Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice" (Jn 18:37); "He who says, 'I know him,' and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn 2:4); "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (1 Jn 5:3). Religion as a whole is much more orthopraxy than orthodoxy, and, in keeping with the same, the hermeneutics of *karma-vāda*, the first hermeneutics of India, is an orthopraxy.

⁶ I think what (the object) I think.

⁷ Also to a philosopher like Śaṅkara, the concepts of *jñāna* (knowledge) and *labha* (acquisition) are synonymous. Cf. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* I.4.7. To him also, the purpose of the Scripture (*śruti*) is not to give us a knowledge of Man (*Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* I.3.7) or the world (*BSB* I.4.14; *BU-b* III.3.1), but *brahmavidyā*, the knowledge of *brahman* as a path for realizing it. Cf. also *Kena-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* I.4, in which the supra-intellectual side of it is emphasized.

Svarga kamo yajeta. The criterion for knowing what the *Veda*, the Scripture, means, is illustrated in the traditional expression *svarga kamo yajeta* (sacrificing with the desire for heaven); it is with this criterion that, as *karma-vadin*, using a hermeneutics of action, we interpret the *Vedas*. The *Vedas* do not claim to tell us what things are, but what we need to do to go to heaven. The *Vedas* should be approached with this question: "What do I have to do (to obtain my salvation)?" The message of the *Vedas* is neither a piece of intellectual information, nor a doctrinal communication, nor a revelation of ideograms, but the revelation of a path. The *Vedas* do not intend to reveal to me the content of a truth, and I cannot approach them on this, but I can question them for the purpose of receiving a commandment so that I may realize an act of salvation. The *Vedas* claim to give an infallible answer to this question.

In Hinduism there is a belief in the *Vedas* that leaves no room for error. But the fundamental characteristic of this belief is that the *Vedas* are exempt from existential errors; that is, they do not deceive us in telling us what we need to do. They are infallible from the point of view of action and not of doctrine. Believing means setting off on the path, being in action, not stopping, being always on the point of acting (with regard to the Sacred only, of course), attaining one's salvation, overcoming oneself. Believing means not even pausing to think (which is also an interruption, although the meditative action can and must also have its place). The object of faith can be translated and expressed in a certain intellectual content but, *primo et per se*, faith is action, dynamism.

Here it is not the task of hermeneutics to cast off doctrine, but to free its "sense," meant as an "existential direction." The role of hermeneutics is to open up the path, set the commandment in motion, free the existential way (direction) in which I must go in order to achieve my purpose. This type of hermeneutics addresses the will rather than the intelligence: What must I do to reach heaven, to arrive at my destination? When I turn to the Scripture with this question, this desire, the Scripture tells me, me specifically, what I must do. The *śruti*, clearly, does not deal with science, metaphysics, or theology; it belongs to the sphere of *ortho-praxy*. Its very name suggests this: "that which is understood, heard."

Artha-vāda

There is also, obviously, a more doctrinal dimension, which represents the second aspect of Hindū hermeneutics. Alongside *karma-vāda* we can also identify a doctrine of Scripture interpretation (*artha* means "meaning," "sense"). Of the six *darśanas*, the six philosophical systems of India, the *pūrvamīmāṃsā* represents almost exclusively an exegesis (which nowhere else do we find as extensively developed as in India)—an exegesis that is led to its extreme consequences, *usque ad nauseam*. Such a system is nothing but an essential, doctrinal hermeneutics, geared to the identification of the meaning. It is not an imposed meaning set above everything else, however; the primary meaning is still that of the *karma-vāda*. By way of example, I would like here to cite a few of the thousands of principles, without commenting on them, just to convey the idea.

Presuppositions

1. The first principle is "the object of the *Vedas* is *dharma*," which, in this context, could effectively be translated as "duty," "salvation" (it is not truth, *satya*). What must be realized is *dharma*, the ontological duty, the ontic growth of our being, the density of the reality of the world, and so on. The fact that the prime object of the Scripture is *dharma* allows us to connect orthopraxy with what we said at the beginning.

2. "The entire content of the Scripture aims at reinforcing the commandments."
3. "There is nothing false and no lie in the inspired books."
4. "The *śruti* (Scripture, in its stricter sense) is followed by *smṛti* (tradition), but in the event of conflict the Scripture prevails over tradition."

General Principles

1. *Sāthakya*: "All words have meaning and usefulness."
2. *Laghava*: "If one meaning is sufficient, there is no need to multiply it" by seeking others.
3. *Arthaikatva*: "A word or a phrase, in the same circumstances, always has the same meaning."
4. *Samanjasya*: "There are no real contradictions; they can only be apparent, and must be overcome."
5. The well-known *vikalpa* axiom: "Wherever contradiction is irreconcilable, choose the meaning you prefer," because overcoming and sublimation are found in praxis, practice.

Principles for the Interpretation of Words

1. "The most common sense is the first."
2. "When the verb is not explicit [that is of fundamental importance in Sanskrit], it must obviously be added, but then the meaning of the phrase is symbolic, not literal."
3. "If the phrase contains a symbolic term, the entire sense becomes symbolic and not literal."

Principles for the Interpretation of Phrases

1. "If the literal sense is clear and complete, no others must be sought."
2. "An obscure passage can be replaced with a clearer one."
3. "An incomplete phrase can be completed with another that completes it," and so on and so forth.

Pluralism

In India there is an undisputed, accepted hermeneutic pluralism that has been handed down from antiquity. Hindū pluralism is founded on two great presuppositions.

There Is a Datum to Interpret

If a philosophy and a theology constitute a hermeneutics, that is, an explication of reality, they imply the existence of a datum that must be interpreted, assimilated, comprehended, grasped, and at the same time realized.

Hermeneutics is based essentially on the presupposition that there is a datum to be explicated, to be known in the deepest sense of the word: to let it be born in us (cf. the French *con-naître*). Philosophy is the discovery, not the creation, of reality. Reality is there, it has been "given" (*datum*, in Latin), even though it is hidden. We could say that philosophy begins from a datum delivered to our reason, and theology from a datum delivered to our faith.

In other words, hermeneutics presupposes a divorce between the real and the true. And here, I believe, we touch on the deepest point. Hermeneutics exists, and it is possible, because

of this divorce between the real and the true. When Man interprets, when he feels the need to interpret, that is, to explain the truth of the *datum* (reality) or discover the truth hidden behind the appearances of truth, he has already lost his primitive innocence, the virginity of his being. He must both divide and fecundate reality through his intervention, through the hermeneutics that he applies to the *datum*. Science is always "of good and evil." Knowledge is always a second birth. Truth always presupposes a tension within Being itself.

We may apply an exclusively essentialist hermeneutics to illustrate the panorama that we are attempting to reveal, or an existential hermeneutics to indicate the steps that each individual must climb by himself—in which case it is a question of discovering the steps we must take in order to attain the goal, liberation, happiness, heaven, *nirvāṇa*, and so on.

There is, as we have said, a truth to interpret—a truth, that is, with which to discover the real. This implies that there is a correlation between the "given" and the receiver. India has never forgotten this. Indeed, there is no given thing without a receiver. The datum, as a *gift*, presupposes the existence of a *giver* and, above all (what we are interested in here), a *receiver*. Well, *hermeneutics* is a *conscious way of receiving the gift*, of receiving reality as a gift. Everything that is datum/given is a gift. India is extremely interested in this existential attitude, this way of approaching not only with the intellect but, so to speak, also on one's knees, in order to take, to receive, the gift.

Yet there are other ways of receiving reality as a gift, which, through hermeneutics, becomes a conscious datum. The Indic soul (despite a certain *Vedāntic* approach) will, with every ounce of its being, refuse to be identified with pure consciousness. I am able to receive reality as a gift not only by grasping it with my conscious reason or embracing it with my intellect, but also by approaching it with open arms or in complete faithfulness and obedience (albeit, perhaps, unconscious), not so much for the purpose of possessing or comprehending it as of letting myself be possessed and comprehended by it. The meaning of life, the meaning of my existence, like—*minutis minuendis*—the meaning of a text, does not depend on the knowledge I have, but on the simple fact that it *exists*. This is why I spoke of the refusal of the Indic soul to identify *being* with *consciousness*. Consequently, it also refuses to identify Man with his consciousness, faith with the awareness of possessing it, and hermeneutics with a purely intellectual interpretation.

In short, without a *datum* being literally given, without a *datum* being conceived as a gift, there would be no hermeneutics.

There Are Different Levels of Truth, but Only One Reality

This is the second presupposition on which the plurality of hermeneutics in India is based: there are different levels of truth. Every hermeneutics reveals a certain level of truth in relation to the person who knows this level. While the first presupposition is based on the *transcendence of the reality* that is given to us as a gift, and which we must approach in order to receive it, the second is based on the *transcendence of the truth* that gradually yields itself to us as we tune into it. We could never be reunited with truth in this life, if it were a monolithic mass with no fissures. The possibility that there exists a true hermeneutics implies the possibility of a plurality of true hermeneutics, otherwise hermeneutics would no longer be "inter-pretation," involving a *décalage*⁸ between the true and the real; it would be identification (inter-penetration) between the two.

Let us now take a closer look at this foundation of pluralism, which, in order to be true, must not be based on a "too bad for the facts" approach, nor on any concession to history,

⁸ "Displacement."

but on the very nature of our human condition. In this practical⁹ hermeneutics of ours, the task is to bring the human subject to salvation. The truth we discover is only a level of truth; it is truth as it stands in relation to the one who knows it, the actual knower who assimilates this truth. It is not an *adaequatio* between the thing itself and the intellect itself, but an *adaequatio* between the given reality and myself, as knower, who wish to grasp this truth—not merely to know it, but to realize it—to save myself by means of the ladder I recognize in the datum that is offered to me.

Ultimately, this would correspond to relativism, if we overlook the following central concept of Hinduism or, rather, of Indic culture *tout court*: the pluralism of truths is counterbalanced by a monolithic oneness of reality.

In other words, India immediately recognizes different levels of truth but only *one reality*, whereas the West is more inclined to admit *one truth* (the truth is one, and when we speak of multiple truths we are afraid that it may sound shocking), but different realities: sensitive, intellectual, intelligible, natural, and so on. Different levels are created everywhere.

This, then, is a result of the predominance of the principle of non-contradiction in the West and the principle of identity in India. In actual fact, this twofold perspective seems to be a consequence of the predominance of one or the other principle. If it is the principle of identity that predominates, this becomes the ultimate criterion of reality. P will be real when I can identify it with S and say, "S is P just as A is A." Now, the identity of the predicate and the subject is only true in the supreme case of the Absolute Being. Since, however, there is no other P that can fulfill the condition "S is P," there can only be one reality: the one reality of the Absolute Being.

On the other hand, if it is the principle of non-contradiction that predominates, this principle will become the criterion of reality: a contradiction cannot have reality. If A is, then Non-A is not. This criterion identifies a being as "being-thinkable." An unthinkable being, based on this principle, is not. India, however, by virtue of the principle of identity, would say that a being is only when it is not (or is no longer) thinkable. The pursuit of non-contradiction as the sole criterion of truth causes us, in Western culture, to multiply the levels of reality. There exists a plurality of thinkable beings because of the multiplicity of predicates that are non-contradictory with the subject and, consequently, the plurality (different levels) of reality.

Summing up, we may say that for India there is only one reality and different levels of truth (that is, approximations to truth), while for the West there exists one single truth and different levels of reality as ontological approximations to, and varying degrees of participation in, the Supreme Being. Such an abbreviated explanation of Indic and Western philosophy needs to be better shaded. I would like, nevertheless, to make a reference to the history of philosophy. When Descartes applies his famous principle of clarity and distinction as a criterion of truth, he is simply illustrating the attitude of the West. The principle of non-contradiction is applied in order to judge the reality of things by means of it.

Consequently, one finds oneself compelled to discover different levels of reality. This is the *ἐν καὶ πολλὰ*¹⁰ of Plato and, with him, the entire Western tradition: *τὸ ὄν καὶ τὰ ὄντα*, Being and beings, *das Sein und die Seienden*. As far as India is concerned, we might also say: *ἐν ὡς πολλὰ*, the One as multiplicity, multiplicity as a symbol of Oneness—Being and the more or less true approximations of Being; Being and its manifestations, its epiphanies, but still Being, nonetheless. It is interesting to note that in Sanskrit to say, "Being and beings," *das*

⁹ I find the term "practical" more modest than "existential," which is already overloaded with connotations.

¹⁰ The One and the many.

Sein und die Seienden, two totally different terms must be used because the verb “to be” has two roots, *as* and *bhu*. We use the verb “is,” *asti*, to refer to Being, but to indicate the beings we must use a different verb: *bhutani*, from *bhu* (cf. the German *werden*, “to become”). In Sanskrit, therefore, we can only say *Being* and *becomers*; it is not possible to say “Be-ing and be-ings.” Indeed, it is not even conceivable that “beings” are simply the plural of Being, the multiplication of Being. Likewise, the Christian concept of creation does not at all mean “multiplication of Being.”

It is clear, then, that there is an enormous, an infinite, difference between Being and beings. The great temptation that language poses to Western logic is that it causes it to forget this difference. The “beings” are therefore made up as little “Being-s.”

The Foundation

The foundation of hermeneutic pluralism lies, in my opinion, in a presupposition that is of great interest to Western philosophy and Christianity itself. This presupposition probably justifies pluralism all by itself, and it is the following: *the radical irreducibility of the (given) datum*.

The whole *datum*, for the very fact that it is given, cannot convert itself completely into a gift and cause the one who gives it (the giver) and the one to whom it is given (the receiver) to disappear. The whole datum always brings with it a mystery, always conveys a message, and for this very reason it cannot be fully identified with the messenger, nor can it take the place of the one who receives the message (the “messed”). The datum as a whole is intrinsically irreducible to a hermeneutics. A hermeneutics can be true without fully identifying with and, consequently, replacing the datum. Hermeneutics is always a means. This principle is twofold:

The Transcendence of Reality/Truth

A *datum* is given us: reality (or truth), which is transcendent, constantly beyond our capacity to grasp it. To use the word “datum,” however, is a clumsy way of expressing or defining this truth, this reality that is *there*. In fact, never is anything wholly *given* us, since the *datum* is always transcendent. This is the principle and presupposition of every religion: there is no religion without mystery, without transcendence, without the absolute, without the *beyond*. We may call it Nothingness, *nirvāṇa*, God, heaven, and so on; the name is not essential. Though Buddhism can be called an “atheist religion,” it could not be defined as a “religion without something else,” without this openness to absolute transcendence. And this transcendence is—N.B.—transcendence in itself, not only in us; not only *quoad nos* but *quoad se*.

We should not forget that transcendence is not relative to us. The transcendence of Mystery, of the Absolute, is not such because of the weakness of our knowledge. It is an essential characteristic of this Being, of that “thing over there.” The transcendence of the Absolute is intrinsic to itself—it is immanent, we might say, somewhat paradoxically. God is always beyond, always separate, always bare and new. Apophatism is not just a weakness in our knowledge, it also belongs to the order of the Absolute (though in a different way with respect to our own order).

What is the Trinity but this unique, sui generis dynamism of the Transcendent, the Absolute, God? The Father is endless, infinite. He never stops giving himself to the Son, and being involved in the Spirit, in whom He finds himself again. Applying these thoughts to hermeneutics, we could say that the hermeneutics of the Father, carried out through the

Son, is endless, infinite. The Son is he who tells us what the Father is, but this "he" that the Father conveys to us through the Son is the infinite Spirit. The Transcendent is transcendent in itself; not only does Being, the Absolute (we have no other terms to express it) surpass *me*, but it also surpasses *itself* in itself. This truth, this "give-ty," is always transcendent in itself. It is infinite, infinite in itself.

The Imperfection of Our Knowledge

The second dimension of our presupposition is that our capacity for knowing, for appropriating data, for learning reality (truth)—in a word, our comprehension, is always imperfect and mediate.

It is not possible for us to grasp all data, nor to grasp data directly or embrace them fully. Neither all data, therefore, nor the complete datum. Our comprehension always means establishing of contact, "grasping" through *intentionality*; it invariably represents a leap—or, very often, a sudden start—toward the opposite shore, the *res significata*.¹¹ In other words, we cannot do without hermeneutics. It is a knowledge, an explanation, that just "signals" and is never through, since we are always *viatores* and never *comprehensores*. Everything of this earth is marked with the temporary, including philosophy, theology, and faith. Our faith is still journeying. All that is earthly is, I would not say "settling" or "becoming," as such expressions are overloaded with philosophical connotations in the West, but in a state of pilgrimage. This includes metaphysics, and this is why it must always be open to other interpretations, however incompatible or even contradictory they may be.

The oblivion of this itinerant nature of all creation, including all that Man does, thinks, or *is*, seems to me to characterize a good part of Western thought, especially from the Middle Ages onward. There certainly exists a "cultural sin of the West," the *hybris*, pride, that can still be perceived in a certain Western self-assurance that has at times allied with faith (since the certainty of faith itself is not entirely separable from fear and trembling). True, we are ready to recognize humility and the temporary, contingent character of our personal being. But, like with the false devotion and the false spirituality flaunted by certain groups in which the simple individual is humility personified while the group oozes with pride and self-importance, we are ready to recognize humility and the wayfaring character of our individual being, but not that of our thought, our doctrine, our metaphysics. And yet, our metaphysics is also *viatrix*, a wayfarer, and remains in a state of temporariness.

It is said that, in this modern, technicalized and secularized Western world, there are no longer any signs of the Sacred, signs that call us to order, like a sort of *Mene Tekel Peres*,¹² because we live surrounded by machines, etc. Well, let me tell you something. When I came back to the West after spending a number of years in India, almost everywhere in Rome (as in all the Western cities) I came across the sign, the mark, the voice of the prophet reminding us of this temporary, wayfaring nature of our being. Everywhere, in fact, you can read, with the impatience typical of those who own vehicles: *Divieto permanente di sosta*, literally "It is permanently prohibited to stop" (the Italian equivalent of "Parking prohibited at any time"). We cannot stop, we cannot settle down permanently in this world, we cannot forget that even the Son of God himself set up no more than a tent (Jn 1:14) here on earth. Undeniably, the West would have liked to settle down with its philosophy, its science, and its technology, in defiance of this *permanent prohibition*. As far as I am concerned, this is the voice

¹¹ The thing/reality being meant.

¹² Cf. Dan 5:25.

that constantly reminds me of the real presence of God in the prophet, who tells me that everything is temporary, not only my being but also all my structures, all my philosophy, my metaphysics, my faith. *Permanent prohibition*, stopping is not allowed, and it is impossible to become settled in this world—not even with our thought. Hermeneutics and hermeneutic pluralism also are in line with this.

Allow me to illustrate this more clearly with an example.

Creation

The danger in India is *ontological monism*, which leads to the realization and recognition of one single *reality*. The risk in the West is *criteriological monism*, which leads to one single *truth*. I believe this is an important consideration that would deserve to be developed further, as well as a consideration on the two forms of tolerance and intolerance—of the East and the West—would. Here, however, we will confine ourselves to our example.

I have spoken about orthodoxy and orthopraxy. We must be wary of what, with a neologism, might be termed as *monodoxy*. Let us take, for example, the quintessential Christian dogma of creation *ex nihilo*, or creation *tout court*—without addressing its content and for the sake of clarification only. I believe that, in principle, we may interpret this dogma, which seems to be a mainstay of Christian hermeneutics as such (it is commonly said that “if you reject the dogma of creation, you are not Christian”), in three ways, while remaining within the bounds, not of *monodoxy*, but of the more rigorous Christian *orthodoxy*.

1. A first possibility—note that I say *possibility*—would be the interpretation of Indic metaphysics, which may have discovered another formulation for illustrating and explaining the same event in Genesis (1:1) without contradicting the traditional explanation and interpretation. This other formulation would be another possible hermeneutics of the event of creation. Western theology speaks of *creatio ex nihilo*, a concept that it has emphasized in opposition to the influence of Plato, who spoke of a pre-existing *πρώτη ὕλη*. Here, therefore, there is no *πρώτη ὕλη*, no pre-existing *materia prima*.

Here *ex nihilo* should be understood exclusively in relation to this rejection of a pre-existing first matter, otherwise Leibniz would be right in saying *ex nihilo, nihil fit*.¹³ Thus, those unfamiliar with the historical reason for the dogmatic formula do not understand and, therefore, reject the *creatio ex nihilo*. India, on the other hand, does not think of creation *ex nihilo*, since the problem of “first matter” does not exist, but emphasizes *creatio a Deo*, not to be mistaken for a *creatio ex Deo*, which would be pantheism. This means that creation is never either outside or independent of God, that the being that is not God (the “created world”) is always *a Deo*, always *in Deo*, and that the so-called creation is never some sort of being thrown, launched, projected out of God, so that beings may then sustain themselves (be) and, consequently, be considered outside and independently of their Origin, Source, and Being.

Here we are still within the bounds of a *complementary* formula, but it is also possible for us to consider a *supplementary* formula. Of course, as long as this hypothetical formula of Indic metaphysics is (at least in a Catholic context) wholly orthodox, it must be able to receive, or, more correctly, it must receive the approval of the church as an equivalent, in depth, of the traditional formulation. This would not be anything new. It is exactly what the church did when it decreed that the *Filioque* equaled the *per Filium*,¹⁴ when, during the

¹³ Nothing comes out of nothing.

¹⁴ With reference to the old controversy about the Holy Spirit, proceeding either “from the Father and the Son” (Catholic Church) or “from the Father *through* the Son” (Orthodox Churches).

trinitarian dispute, it established that the three *Persons* were three ὑπόστασεις and not three οὐσίαι or three simple πρόσωπα.¹⁵ Thus, two different formulations were recognized as having the same meaning. It is possible, therefore, that hermeneutic pluralism exists in a matter that is as fundamental as that of creation.

2. A second possibility would be to find a more general and more profound truth which, without negating Genesis 1:1, would integrate it in a dogmatic formulation that is more comprehensive, more general, and also more precise. If (and I repeat, "if"), for example, Genesis 1:1 could be defined or placed within the context of St. John's christocentric or christological interpretation (Jn 1:3), *omnia per ipsum facta sunt*,¹⁶ if it were recognized that pure nature had never been "created," that all things were *made* through the Word, or if the dogma of creation could be integrated with the dogma of a certain Christophanic conception of Being, then we might be able to count on a hermeneutics of the dogma of creation in which the latter is not negated but integrated in another formulation.

3. The third possibility (extremely, or perhaps *overly*, Indic) would be to transcend all formulation and stay within an experience that I would call mystic—with all due reserves. If we do not leave the ineffable mystic experience, we remain in a sphere that can accommodate a multiple translation into the various languages and philosophies. I do not say that the different formulations are equivalent, but that the ultimate experience may be the same. Christians *can believe* in creation and express themselves thus: *fides non est de enuntiabilibus*,¹⁷ because they see in the dogma of creation the expression of an ineffable and transcendent truth.

Hindūs *can do without the faith* in the "dogma" of creation even though they wish to safeguard the Christians' own experience. However, since their whole mental system and all their categories do not allow them to express what they would like to express, they negate the creationist formulation, though they believe in the same thing, are driven by the same intentionality, and strive for the same *res significata*. This *res significata*, however, cannot be expressed fully and completely, but only in a way that is not false. Thus Hindūs and Christians find themselves together in an experience of contact, where silence is preserved, and it is possible to believe that mutual understanding goes beyond formulation: doctrines do remain different. This goes even further: in doctrinal domination, Christians will oppose the Hindūs and their anti-creationist doctrine, claiming that the latter is false . . . yet we must not forget that the doctrinal order is not the ultimate order.

With this example I have tried to illustrate the possibility of non-doctrinal hermeneutics. We cannot, of course, repudiate the doctrinal order, but neither should we idolize it, that is, turn it into stone. The essence of the idol is petrification, and sometimes it is not only stone but also formulas that become petrified.

Christian Pluralism as a Matter of Fact

In Christianity, as a matter of fact, philosophical and theological pluralism certainly exists. For example, Duns Scotus developed a philosophy, and Thomas Aquinas developed another. The church fathers and the Scholastics, Suárez and Molina, Thomism and Augustinism, and the schools of spirituality themselves (Benedictine, Carmelite, Jesuit, Franciscan . . .) are, ultimately, *paths* that exclude one another.

¹⁵ "Hypostases," not three different "substances" or simply "masks."

¹⁶ "Everything has been made through Him."

¹⁷ "Faith is not about formulations" (but about God's very reality), after a sentence by Thomas Aquinas.

No one in the Christian world would dream that these could mutually banish or excommunicate each other. Indeed, the fact that hermeneutics is pluralistic does not, I believe, go against any need regarding thought or reality. On the other hand, the very fact that hermeneutics is *possible* does not mean that it is *true*. The truth of a hermeneutics does not imply its oneness or its monopoly.

Conclusions

In conclusion, what India teaches us, or, more accurately, what we may learn from Hinduism, what may stimulate our individual and collective reflection, can be summed up in the following points:

1. It is possible for pluralism to exist without the risk of falling prey to agnostic relativism.
 2. This pluralism, which is the foundation of genuine tolerance, is based on the distinction between orthopraxy and orthodoxy. If I identify Christianity with orthodoxy, those who do not think like me are in error and must be opposed. If the sense of Christianity is "ortho-practical," neither I myself nor those who have a different way of contemplating and understanding the doctrine—assuming they are in good faith and are united with me in the Mystery—will lose touch with serenity, fellowship, and charity. There will be room for true tolerance, because we recognize a supra-doctrinal communion.
 3. Doctrinal pluralism necessarily issues from the transcendence of truth/reality and the imperfection of our knowledge.
 4. The logical possibility and the natural plausibility of a hermeneutics do not justify its existential truth. For this reason, we need another authority, another criterion: the Church (Scripture and Tradition), which—in my humble opinion—is above and beyond hermeneutics. That is . . .
 5. The very fact of hermeneutics compels us to go beyond it as the ultimate and final way to truth and salvation. In other words, hermeneutics may be multiple because it is not the last word, it must always be surpassed—in life, in existence, in faith, and in the Mystery.
- If in the Father's house there are many mansions (Jn 14:2), here on earth, which has not yet reached the end, there may surely be different hermeneutics!

THE FRAGMENT AND THE PART

An Indic Reflection

"Accipit panem et benedicens fregit"

—Mk 14:22

Having to reflect on the "Fragmentation of the Church" from an Asian perspective, I prefer to limit myself to an Indic viewpoint. "Indic" stands for the traditional cultures of that subcontinent of which India is a political unit, but not the only one. We should add that the Indic mentality is not uniform either.

If Indic theology represents *in nuce* a theological mutation, as the many publications of the Indian Theological Association clearly show, a theological meditation coming from that part of the world should not (subservient to the techno-scientific fashion) jump into answering the question without critically reflecting on the nature of the problem that has triggered the question itself.¹

For too long the church, or rather the churches, in non-Western countries have been simply colonies of the "mother" churches—not only financially but also intellectually and spiritually. "The Basel Mission," for instance, has a sophisticated and wonderful theology, but I wonder what its impact could be on an Indic soul over against the different theology of, say, the "Swedish Compound." We have exported the European disputes into countries that did not see the vital connection between Christ and the theological interpretations of a past foreign to them. And now those countries begin to feel proud of being "independent"—in spite of the flaws of that *svarāj* or self-governance.

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This oversimplified introduction, which in no way wants to be a criticism of the past, offers the "Sitz im Leben" for the overcondensed following reflections. I emphasize that we are dealing with a way of thinking and feeling that may be refractory to the premises of historical Christendom and the post-Cartesian assumptions, which are, by and large, the predominant categories of modern theological interpretations of Christian faith. The necessary pre-understanding of the Christian mystery by the cultures of Asia may not lead to the same *intellectus fidei*, or the same vision of the church, in our case.

"*The Church in Fragments.*" Which church? I venture a threefold answer that may reflect an Asian view. The church as . . .

- ◊ an organization is in fragments.
- ◊ an institution is in crisis.
- ◊ an organism is wounded.

¹ Cf., esp., M. Amaladosh, T. K. John, G. Gispert-Sauch, eds., *Theologizing in India* (Bangalore: T. P. I., 1981), and G. v. Leeuwen, ed., *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology* (Bangalore: A. T. C., 1984).

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1. An *organization* comes into being by an external will for some definite goal, and is maintained in its existence by a definite set of rules. It is defined by its constitution or founding charter. It needs power and a board of directors. It lives by virtue of its own efficiency. And there is no need to stress that organizations are needed for political life. Man is a political animal, a social being.

I remember Father Danielou (at that time not yet a cardinal) saying that what churches and sects are to the main body of Protestantism, religious orders (and congregations) are in the Catholic Church. Fragments or parts?

A "fragment" is a "fraction," the result of an "infraction," we may say playing with words, and because the church was "fragile" it suffered a "fracture." A hint for historians.

A "part" is a "portion" of a whole and it "participates" in it. Now, to take a part for the whole (*pars pro toto*) may be a schism if we think spatially and mechanically but if we think symbolically and mystically it may stand for the local church (*totum in parte*). A hint for theologians.

If the church were only an organization, with a "Confederation of Churches," we might have an answer to the fragmentation. But a certain theology would maintain that the fractures are so serious that they cannot be healed by a super-organization, although such a confederation may be regarded as a pragmatic way of dealing with the problem. It may not be foreign to the genius of the Anglo-Saxon mentality to find a practical answer in a "World Council of Churches"—other ecclesiological problems notwithstanding.

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2. An *institution* comes into being by an inner necessity of communal life. It is a cultural phenomenon. Man is a cultural animal. It requires a certain accepted structure. It needs a certain recognized order that crystallizes in a moral code. *Leges mori serviunt* (laws are subservient to custom) knew the Western classics. Caste, marriage, and state (which moderns still write state) are institutions. They are alive owing to the felt need of those who belong to them—or because of sheer inertia.

Institutions are needed, although they should be flexible enough so as to fulfill their function of enhancing human life. Life is the ground for *dharma* says the *Hitopadesha* (1.37). *Dharma* is closer to nature than to law, to order than to duty.

There is no doubt that the church as an institution is in crisis. "Christianity yes, churchianity no," say many people in India. The crisis has many causes. We shall mention only two of them.

One is the imbalance between the modern mentality (with all its ambivalence) and the traditional ecclesial worldview (with all its richness).

An optimistic interpretation of the crisis is what the late Cardinal Suhard of Paris called a "crisis of growth," opinion shared also by Pope John XXIII. Modern society, for good and/or ill, has evolved at a pace that has not been the rhythm of the church. Thousands of books have been written on the subject. It concerns the church at large, it rebounds on Asia, but it is not particularly an Eastern problem. In spite of the over 200 million of Asian Christians, theology is still mainly a Western concern—as is the very name "theology."

From an also still optimistic perspective the second origin of the crisis may be called a crisis of adaptation, like the crisis an adopted adolescent from an Indian village can have when transplanted into a Western family. There is no doubt that the church, notwithstanding some historical exceptions, is a Western institution transplanted into the East when she was practically sixteen centuries old and had already a strongly developed constitution. No wonder that many a trauma appeared in the last centuries.

One way of minimizing the scars was to keep Christians aloof from the main currents of the cultural and political life of the respective countries. One could call it ghetto mentality, compound syndrome, superiority complex, otherworldly attitude, and the like. The theological temptation was, of course, to justify this policy by affirming that "we" had the whole truth, better, "catholic"—in short, a theology on which nowadays we would put the label of "exclusivism."

But with the decolonization of the world those churches (many of them still under "Propaganda Fide") want to have their say and feel they have the right and duty of affirming their Christian identity in a different manner. The inclination of many modern theologians tends here to "inculturation" and "inclusivism." Much has been discussed also on those issues. I am resisting the temptation to enter that field again. Instead I wish to tackle here the Indic "view-point" by not dealing with theological doctrines, but stressing the different ways of thinking (*Denkweisen*) of an important part of the Asian peoples. For brevity sake let us elaborate on this issue by focusing on our particular point by a couple of examples.

"An Asian view" of the situation of the church today perceives the ordinary theological explanations regarding Jesus Christ founding an institution exaggerated, to say the least, and does not resonate too well to many Western theological discussions (number of sacraments, marriage rules, women priests, liturgical laws, etc.) based on arguments like the will of the Founder, the translatability of the Gospels into canon law, the theological weight of historical customs, the importance given to "specific differences," and so on—without now taking sides or saying that one could not strike compromises and follow middle ways.

Perhaps due to the caste system ingrained in the Indic psyche or due to other reasons, the fact is that the bundle of religions called Hinduism from the outside ("Hinduism" is a foreign notion to the traditional "religions" of the Indian subcontinent) does "function" without any notion of church as a central or even necessary institution for the existence of the religious faith and the religious life of the people.²

What appears in the West as "fragments" of a torn apart church of Christ appears to the Indic mind rather as "parts," portions of a whole whose cohesion and unity lie elsewhere beyond any institution. With the exception of the Islamic mentality, the Indic soul tends to see differences as parts of a whole that does not need to be articulated in any clear and distinct idea, nor in an institutionalized way. The access to the whole is not through the sum, neither is it through the integral calculus of its parts. Were it not for the cautions and prohibitions of the Christian churches, the Eastern peoples are prone to participate in other religious rituals as parts of a mysterious or numinous reality. They do not feel separated.

It is not an exception in Japan to be initiated in a Shinto temple at birth, while at the same time being a practicing Buddhist and nowadays even celebrating marriages in a Christian church—superficialities and eclecticism notwithstanding. It is well known that when the pope comes to India thousands of Hindūs are keen on receiving the Eucharist, without any sense of being "fragmented" from that religious manifestation of the Sacred. Not only does church appear in portions, but religions also are seen as portions of that human dimension which in the West is called religion. One may codify *dharma*, for instance, but not institutionalize it.

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3. An *organism* is born; it is enlivened by a soul or living principle. It comes into existence by a fecundation between the parents. It needs health. It is not just political—but natural, not just an expedient way of orderly living but a given fact. Man is a living being.

² Cf. some pertinent reflections in my short article: "The Hindū Ecclesial Consciousness: Some Ecclesiological 'Reflections,'" *Jeevadhara* 21 (1974): 199–205.

A living being is an organism, ultimately a miracle. Was the Church founded or born? *Ecclesia ab Abel.*

Nobody can serve two masters. Either the church is to *mysterion tou kosmou, sacramentum mundi*, the continuation of the Incarnation, the Eucharist (in the sense in which the late Cardinal H. de Lubac expanded in his *Méditation sur l'Eglise*) and Christianity the religion of the Word (and not of the Book), or the church is not only in fragments, but she is lifeless, she has lost her soul—which traditionally is said to be the Holy Spirit. In fact, the people of India and other parts of Asia understand better and relate much more easily to the mystery of Easter and the Eucharist than to the events of Christmas and the Incarnation—although it all hangs together (as the Hindū, Taoist, Shinto, and Buddhist mind spontaneously believe).

We cannot deny that in today's predominant culture those theologumena are practically dead or ineffective. They are reserved for mystics or holy people. After centuries of historical Christianity starting with Constantine, perhaps Torquemada is still needed and Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor has a point. But must the seed of Christ still alive in the church be identified with the luxuriant tree of Western Christianity? And to continue with cardinals, one of them was complaining to me, off the record indeed, when he heard of the "quaint" idea of Pope John to call for an ecumenical council: "But who can trust in the theology of the majority of Asian and African bishops which I know too well how rudimentary it is!" Sound advice to a board of directors before the general assembly of a corporation. Should that apply also to the church?

Far from me to present the Asian view as only spiritual and mystic, nor am I saying that an *ecclesia spiritualis* can exist without a historical and an earthly incarnation. But also far from the intention of these lines to propose healing the wounds of the church by artificial and violent surgery. A living organism has its ways of regenerating, even if it is a fragmented bone, to follow our metaphor.

But there is still more, and this would be nearer to the Asian view. Perhaps the church is not so fragmented after all, perhaps that Spirit of Christ, that Mystical Body is well and alive, although it has escaped our control. Perhaps that Spirit that already before creation "hovered over the waters," "fills every creature and has knowledge of every sound" is still blowing sovereignly where "she" wills. "He" broke the Bread into fragments and gave it to all. Perhaps it is an urgent task to put together the broken fragments not by an external glue but by receiving them with eucharistic reverence so as to collaborate in the redemption of the world by rebuilding the Body of Christ—to restore the dismembered body of Prajāpati, the Vedas would say.

In brief: The fact that this very language may sound strange to many ears shows already that the Mystical Body of Christ is indeed wounded until the Fullness of the Glory is achieved.

*

"Which unity?" Seen from an Indic view the unity of the church is a desperate enterprise as long as we dream of an administrative unity or a uniformity of doctrines. Man is certainly a *res cogitans*, a thinking thing, but Man is much more than his ideas. Likewise, the church is much more than a belief system. Faith is not just its intellectual articulation in beliefs, important as they are. If we see the church fragmented it may be because by that name we refer only to our conception of it (or to her outer garment), having dreamed of that "seamless tunic" (Jn. XIX.23) as image of the church, and now seeing her torn apart by sin and time. We forget that "He" had also other garments that were divided into four parts among Gentiles, and even that his "type" Joseph had a "tunic of many colors" (Gen. 37:23) as the old Christian interpretation of the "circumdata varietate" of the Vulgate (Ps 44:10)

shows—whatever the original text and context may be. If we see the church fragmented it may be because we are still looking for the living among them and have not understood the revelation of the angel as reported by all the synoptics: “He is not here, since he is risen.” He is neither in Jerusalem nor in Garizim, neither in Rome nor in Mecca, neither in Vrindaban or in Bodhgaya nor in Washington or Moscow.

Don’t misunderstand me. The church is also a visible society. The Roman Church subsists in the Catholic Church, said Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, 8), acknowledging a difference between the church of Christ and the Roman Church. The previous drafts were in fact amended, changing the original *est* (meaning identification) into a *subsistit in* (making room for a wider conception of church). But this “catholic church,” this “ecclesia universalis,” I would further venture to say, *exists* since the beginning of the world, “a constitutione mundi,” as the Patristic interpretation entitles us to suggest.

I repeat that I am attempting to present an Indic view, not a theological doctrine. This view is not only an “objective” vision; it depends mainly on the eye of the beholder. Part of the “fragmentation” may be in our own sight. It all depends what we see. Many an Asian Christian will understand that thousands of Europeans leave the “church” because they do not want to contribute to a particular church politics and thus refuse to pay “Kirchensteuer,” but they will also think that the mystical body they belong to has little to do with Caesar’s coins or the Constantinian heritage.

“We are all *brahman*,” a good number of Asian people believe in different ways and say in various expressions. But not everybody knows it (that we are *brahman*, or that we are all manifestations of an ineffable Mystery, have Buddha-nature . . .). “We are all church” would be an assertion more convincing to the deep recesses of the psyche of Asian Christians—although not everybody knows it. Perhaps the “fragmentation” of the church is the great challenge for Christians in the incoming third millennium, so that the encounter with Asia and Africa may help the church to come of age. *Ecclesia semper nascitura*—“by work and grace of the Holy Spirit.” Asian Christians have a peculiar devotion to Mary!

SECTION III
NEW PROSPECTIVES OF HINDUISM

INDRA'S CUNNING

The Challenge of Modernity: The Indic Experiment

Preface¹

In 1955 I wrote *Letter from India*, which was published in book form years later.² It was written only seven years after the Independence of India and Pakistan. Goa and Pondicherry were two living, and for some, painful reminders of India's past. Bangladesh did not exist; Sikkim had not yet been annexed to India. It was a formative time, bristling with possibilities, but not without its confusions and political intrigues. Independence had created some thorny problems and thrust the country into new crisis.³ From as early as 1950, when the "planning" began, it was evident that the Gandhian dream of decentralization and village-level democracy had been obscured by another antipodal dream: that of power and world prestige.⁴

More than fifty years later, I feel encouraged to offer the fragments of a "New Letter" on the Indic Experiment as a major example of the destiny of what we call "modernization" and, ultimately, of the fate of India and of the Indian peoples.⁵

I wanted to keep the ideal of the first book and answer positively the underlying questions that already emerged at that time. Year after year I have been studying the situation. If Indological and philosophical studies lose touch with daily reality it becomes an abstraction or a lifeless museum piece. If, on the other hand, we lose sight of the whole, we are carried

¹ [In this particular text we decided it would be more appropriate not to include a detailed bibliography but to refer only to the author and year of publication, since the sole purpose of the notes is to support the content, which, while it does deal with the situation in India, strives above all to provide a historico-social view of all mankind. *Ed.*]

² Panikkar (1960/III).

³ George Orwell's remark about India in 1946 was prophetic: "Your problems will begin when you are free, just as our problems started after we won the war," quoted by Jay Dubashi (1984), pp. 92–93.

⁴ We are certainly far away from Lady Wilson's *Letters from India* (1911) written from 1889 to 1909. The fiftieth celebration of Independence was marked by bitter criticism of the politics of the government. Although one is grateful for the freedom of the Indian press, it is useful to recall that when Amartya Sen visited New Delhi in 1991 he "pointed out that the Indian Press, though free to an unparalleled degree, often got its priority wrong." He drew attention to the small number of articles on education and particularly on rural education (Muralidharan 1999/1, pp. 122–24).

⁵ Precisely because I would like to invite the reader to consider ultimate problems, I have taken pains in the footnotes to adduce anecdotes and examples that cannot be dismissed as atypical or mere curiosities. Most of these notes have been prepared by N. Shāntā, who has revised the successive manuscripts offering penetrating reflections; Steve Hopkins assisted for the first manuscript, Josep Maria García for the manuscript of 1995, and Marcel Farran for the last one; to them thanks are due. Thanks also, of course, to Francis D'Sa, who edited the last version.

away by the latest events. The gestation period of this study may have been necessary for writing this Second Letter in the present book.

My argument could be presented like this: In the Vedic pantheon, Indra is the tempter God. Real temptations always come from the Gods or the angels, which is why such temptations place us in a humanly inescapable dilemma. The objects that tempt us are good things, or so we are led to believe: appetizing, enticing, and luminous as a ripe apple or, in the modern myth, an Apple (computer). If you succeed in resisting the real temptation you may harm yourself, or perhaps even irreparably destroy something within you. Repression rarely has a positive effect. You may also lose many advantages. In our case, if India resists the temptation of modernization she may not be able to stand as an independent state and may lose any chance of being a rising "power" in the political arena of the present-day world. On the other hand, if you do not resist you are caught, and though you may feel the excitement of new discoveries, the fascination of the unknown and the awakening of your potentialities, you may also lose your identity, perhaps your joy, and likely your soul—even if "they" "respect" you because you have the atom bomb.

If you truly had the strength to overcome the temptation, there would have been no real temptation at all. If there is nothing to make you doubt, if you feel no allurements, you will not be tempted by any apple. You would have discovered that the "apple" is no longer that appealing "round firm fleshy fruit of a rosaceous tree," as the Oxford Dictionary, with theological undertones, still defines the word.⁶ You would discover that in order for the Apple computer to function it must computerize your mind, rob you of much of your spontaneity, and sap your subjectivity in favor of some so-called objective data.⁷ Yet, once you have yielded, the only way out is through forgiveness or redemption. Otherwise, there is simply catastrophe.

Indra himself has made the allurements irresistible. He, the drinker of Soma, the destroyer of "stone-built cities," the giver of arms, the seducer and tempter, is taking his revenge. He, the most prominent God in the *Rg-veda*—Agni his twin brother being a special case—is no longer using his *vajra*, the thunderbolt, against the *dāsyus*, the first inhabitants of the Indic subcontinent, but against the *āryans*, the conquerors themselves.⁸ The ancient battle still rages. What goes on in heaven we do not know, for there Indra has disappeared from the

⁶ See Engels's Preface to his *Anti-Düring*: "It was the kind of apple that once bitten into, had to be completely devoured; and it was not only very sour, but also very large" (*apud* Burns [1978], p. 10).

⁷ Let me quote a remarkable piece of Chinese wisdom: "Sze-kung had been rambling in the south in Khu, and was returning to Sin. As he passed (a place) on the north of Nan, he saw an old man who was going to work on his vegetable garden. He had dug his channels, gone to the well, and was bringing from it in his arms a jar of water to pour into them. Toiling away, he expended a great deal of strength, but the result which he accomplished was very small. Sze-kung said to him, 'There is a contrivance here, by means of which a hundred plots of ground may be irrigated in one day. With the expenditure of a very little strength, the result accomplished is great. Would you, Master, not like (to try it)?' The gardener looked up at him, and said, 'How does it work?' Sze-kung said, 'It is a lever made of wood, heavy behind and light in front. It raises the water as quickly as you could do with your hand, or as it bubbles over from a boiler. Its name is shadoof.' The gardener put on an angry look, laughed, and said, 'I have heard from my teacher that, where there are ingenious contrivances, there are sure to be subtle doings; and that, where there are subtle doings, there is sure to be a scheming mind. But, when there is a scheming mind in the breast, its pure simplicity is impaired. When this pure simplicity is impaired, the spirit becomes unsettled, and the unsettled spirit is not the proper residence of the Tao. It is not that I do not know (the contrivance which you mention), but I should be ashamed to do it.' Kwang-Sze (ed. & transl. Legge 1962), XII.2.V. The continuation of the story, telling about the reaction and bewilderment of the Confucianist, is worth pondering.

⁸ I shall not enter here into the historical problems regarding Aryans and Dravidians.

modern Indic pantheon. He is too busy on earth. But in this study I would like to narrate something of what is going on among the mortals. He, the Father of Arjuna, seems to delight in the fact that even his son no longer obeys the biddings of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Yet the heavenly drama does not end in tragedy because it has no end. What may "end" is simply its earthly reenactment. The word *tragedy* may not be used here for the simple fact that there may be no one left to witness the "event." The apple may explode.

In sum, if we merely resist the temptation of modernity, we are thrown back into the worst obscurantism of past ages, and yet if we do not resist we are doomed. Is there any way out of the dilemma?

My suggestion is that we may overcome the dilemma not by eating or not eating the apple (principle of non-contradiction), but by doing something that the serpent suggested, and which Adam did not understand. Adam could only think of defying or not defying the order, but could not even imagine challenging YHWH himself, since Adam was his created image. In contrast, the Vedic myth allows this challenge to the Deity. Men and Gods belong together. Indra himself is a cunning God. It is all a question of integral *jñāna*, saving knowledge; of unraveling Indra's trick and thus dissolving the very temptation. Indra does not use any snake as intermediary.

My thesis is this: After pursuing "modern development" with neither the excuse nor the handicap of colonial rule, sixty-five years of independence in the Indic subcontinent are sufficient to demonstrate that the path of modernization India has taken has not delivered the promised liberation. It has not delivered the goods, and has failed.⁹

The reason, the thesis continues, lies not in the fact that we—both the governing and the governed—lack moral strength or intellectual know-how (the official thesis), but that we have taken the wrong path. We are actually marching in the wrong direction.

This has not always been the case. Perhaps under the influence of Gandhi's ideals the wise policy of the Indian government at the beginning was to stand apart from the world economy. It was not felt to be a temptation, and this aloofness enabled India to avoid enduring the impact of the 1982 world recession to the same degree as other nations. This made India self-supporting in 90 percent of her basic needs and free from the rampant inflation felt by so many countries, as well as from the burden of borrowed money.¹⁰

Let me emphasize at the very outset that the fact of having chosen the myth of Indra in no way implies that I am defending the Sanskritization of India or am ignoring the polychromic mosaic of the Indic subcontinent and the Republic of India in particular. One of the most negative aspects of modern India is the practical contempt for Ādivāsīs (first inhabitants) and Dalits ("down-trodden"). The concentration on "nation-building" during the first years after Independence caused the neglect—to be excessively gentle—of the most

⁹ In gentler terms this is the overall conclusion of the special issue of *Daedalus*, "Another India," Fall 1989. See esp. Nandy (1989), pp. 1–26, and Kothari (1989), pp. 51–67.

¹⁰ It was a known fact that India was not exactly a paradise for the multinationals, but more recently even the Marxist West Bengal government has contacted a host of foreign investors who are not only exploring the possibilities but are proposing concrete projects. See Sen Gupta in *The Hindū*, September 15, 1985, pp. 81ff. So did the previous leftist government in Kerala. See R. Menon (1990), pp. 101ff. Five years later the Indian deficit had increased in alarming proportions. See the figures of the VIII Five-Years-Plan. As of December 1990 it has been calculated that the deficit for 1990/91 may be a minimum of 14,000 crores. See *The Hindū*, December 13, 1990. Since the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and, especially, the fall of the Soviet Empire and the triumph of capitalism, the situation has worsened beyond measure. See the data we give later. In February 1992 the World Bank was ready to make heavy investments, which was welcomed as a great push to the Indian economy, ignoring the fact that the major benefits would go elsewhere. The temptation has not been resisted. Indra had it.

ancient inhabitants of the country and the most oppressed citizens of the land. Indra is a Vedic God, although no longer of so-called classical Hinduism and much less of the living religions of India—yet is also mentioned in Jaina and Buddhist Scriptures. Indra is the God that has oppressed those of “inferior race,” the colored people (*dāsam varṇam*). But now, it seems, he turns against his own allies, and might serve us as a symbol of reconciliation and as an example of how myths can be cross-cultural. I could have used an *orāon* or a *bhil* myth, or even a Muslim or a Christian story, but there is no denying the fact that, for good or for ill, Vedic lore has a wider resonance and can divest itself up to a certain extent of particular connotations. Without denying that India belongs to “The Continent of Circe,”¹¹ I feel that Indra resonates better with the Indic soul than any Greek myth.

In any case, we need to recure to myth for a very fundamental reason: only a new myth can save us. Yet myths are not produced at will. Myths emerge. A new myth can only emerge when the myth of rationality, as the only horizon under which modernity sees reality, gives way to another wider and deeper horizon. Modern Man lives almost entirely in a two-dimensional world, that world formed by human events and material things. The third dimension (the sacred or the Divine), even if theoretically accepted or recognized, does not play a major role in the lives of the self-appointed “First World,” except in the form of religious fundamentalisms or private practices. If we want to overcome the modern predicament, we need not just the help of the Gods, we need to associate them in our (and their) endeavor. May we confront Indra’s power?

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The *first part* of this study, after scratching the surface of the current state of affairs, prepares the background for situating what I optimistically call the *Interludes*.

The *second part* intends to show that the deeper reasons for our predicament are twofold:

1. The inability of traditional Indic civilizations to confront the technocratic complex of Modernity.
2. The intrinsic self-defeating character of technocratic civilization.

The *third part* suggests overcoming the dilemma by showing it to be false, a trick of Indra. It also addresses the question of the traditional bases for a desirable society. The task is barely possible, but the Gods love the impossible, and Viśvakarman may be the only one who can appease the Vṛtra-han (killer of the demon Vṛtra), which is one of the names of Indra.

The first two parts, which are simply descriptive, are necessary if we are to avoid building the third on merely hasty impressions. We are engaged in a *daivāsura* struggle of historic, even cosmic, proportions.

Sociological Introduction

Although I am convinced that India’s predicament owes much to the neglect of the metaphysical tradition and onto-anthropological thinking, it would only foster a distortion of both—as it has often been the case—if we should lose sight of the concrete and actual situation of the people. We are not dealing with Being or with Man, but with a political country and real individuals, though they are also trans-historical and super-individual realities.

¹¹ N. C. Chaudhuri (1978).

A First Approach

I begin with what is visible in daily life, some ordinary facts or events which, revealing underlying currents, may offer clues to unravel the complicated fabric of Indic society today. I draw only on a few apparently non-transcendent and familiar examples.

In Madras, before it regained its former name of Chennai, you emerge from the railway station, avoid the few peddlers who offer you their services, and go straight to a taxi. As for the fare, there is no point in arguing: the taximeter does not "work." The driver will demand a price two or three times the "normal" fare. If you are not Indian, I assume the fare will be considerably higher. It is no use asking help from a nearby policeman. Possibly a foreigner will receive better treatment from him; it is a question of "prestige." But even if the policeman had no share in the cabdriver's profit, he would certainly sympathize with him, since, although the cabdriver may well earn a little more than the policeman, both earn considerably less than any prospective client of the taxi. They are well aware that what they—the relatively well-to-do of the working class—earn in a year is what the tourist from overseas or the rich Indian is likely to earn in a day. Not to mention the many women breaking stones or carrying bricks for repairing roads or building houses who still make only a few rupees per day. Why on earth should the rich and the tourist not pay more? Seen from this perspective, the taximeter is an unjust burden on the taxi.

But it becomes an altogether different matter if I were to ask a favor of the taxi driver.

Some years ago the Ganga-Kavery train arrived late at Central Station. I had to catch a connection at Egmore Station that was scheduled to depart in only a few minutes. Since I had to be in Madurai the next morning I hailed a cab and told the driver of my plight. He understood. We flew through Madras and I managed to catch my train (which fortunately was a little late leaving). The driver did me a favor, and you do not pay for favors. Here we touch a human dimension that is not monetizable.

It is romantic to say that on Indian roads pilgrims, pedestrians, bicycles, bullock-carts, stray cows, motorbikes, camels, elephants, cars, and lorries mingle together. But the difference between the rickshaw and the car is really only qualitative, and the key here is quick money.¹²

Some taxi drivers only rent their vehicle and do not make much profit, but if the driver owns the car he feels he belongs to a superior category of beings. He honks his horn mercilessly at pedestrians, even if the poor creatures respectfully stand aside, and more often than not he drives recklessly.

Why do I indulge in such a description? Some might say that a philosopher should not pay attention to these "trifles" because India is the land of lofty spiritual doctrines and otherworldly ascetic practices. In actual fact, however, the firecrackers that still go off in the temples, and the festivities of Dusserah, Ramadān, Durgāpūjā, Dipāvali, and so on, are not only noisy, popular, and imbued with glamour and ecstatic fervor, but they also represent something entirely different from what one would expect of the mystical or philosophical India of the textbooks. People seem to be happy. In fact, only a few seem to want to protest the abuses of the drivers, the visible exploitation of the women, children, and Dalits, or the breaking of the most elementary laws. Is this selfishness or "holy indifference"? Inherited passivity or impotency? A realization that nothing will change, or utter despair?

¹² "... with the help of science, the possibility of profit has suddenly become immoderate," wrote Tagore in 1920 (reprint 1980), pp. 66–67. An advertisement on the front page of *The Hindū*, December 13, 1986, tells us, "Earn more than 80 percent per annum. Invest in ..." The ad then cites the example of giving only Rs 50, which will become 90 at the end of the year. Any psychologist will explain to us the alluring power of the small amount in the example, and any economist will tell us where the profit comes from.

An "educated" minority will tell you in the same breath that technology is needed but harmful, unavoidable but no lasting solution to India's problems, that it is leading the country to catastrophe, and yet thanks to it India has improved in many fields.¹³ They will also explain why there is really no solution for the miserable poverty of the vast majority. . . .¹⁴

The problems are complex, and we cannot tackle all their implications.¹⁵

I would like, however, to single out only a few instances that may shed light on the current crisis.¹⁶

All my life I have been advocating mutual fecundation among cultures and religions. In India I see this mutual fecundation taking place in the outlook of a few people, but there remains a distressing confusion among the majority. What is taking place on the macro level is only a travesty of what I have been urging; it is the meeting of the worst aspects of Indic culture with the most negative features of Western tradition. The blare of traffic, unbearable pollution, and the sheer recklessness of drivers could serve as examples. In a traditional society, city streets are the prolongation of the habitat, and can also serve as the bazaar or market—a place where people meet, converse, transact, play, and quarrel. By contrast, in modern society, city streets are simply transportation routes—and obstacles to communication. In India there are both, and neither. The first function (extension of the house) is made impossible by noise, cars, trucks, and auto-rickshaws, and the second (place of human transactions) is also hampered by the same din of engines and choking fumes.

And yet, even in India mutual fecundation is a historical fact. What is Europe if not the result of such fertilization? An important and much-neglected example in India is the mutual impact of Islām on Hinduism, and vice versa. "Hindū" India, after six hundred years of Muslim presence, shows the positive influences of Islām, on music, the arts, literature, and even religion (the *Sufi* influence on Hindū *bhakti*).¹⁷ We need only compare a north African with an Indian Muslim to see how "Hindū" the Indian Muslim is.

¹³ No less a person than the former president of India, Zail Singh, has uttered the same words almost verbatim: "Man must inevitably advance along the lines of industrialization and modernization. And at the same time he must suffer the harmful side-effects of such activities" (*The Hindū*, April 4, 1987).

¹⁴ See "Crippling Contradictions," *India Today*, January 15, 1984, p. 8: "The public indifference to the entire development process stems primarily from the Planning Commission's failure to relate the plans to the ways of life of different segments of Indian society. Almost six plans have created an elitist, dominant way of life which is so cut off from the quality of life of the vast numbers of poor that it is no longer possible to look at the plans as harbingers of development with social justice and civic morality. Whatever rural programmes are initiated end up helping everyone else but the poor."

A. S. Ramasamy (1989), in his article "State Planning without Native Orientation," starts his lucid analysis with these alarming and desperate words: "If there is one country in the world, where its own socio-cultural setting is not the basis for its development efforts, where fancy ideas and ornamental institutions tried at heavy cost abound, where conspicuous and ostentatious consumption is most and the art of economizing is the least, and where its own people are not trusted, it is India." He strongly emphasizes that "Planning for rural development would be realistic if done by the rural people." But, he concludes, "Do the people in the cities know that if the villagers organize themselves and stop producing food grains over and above their requirements, urban culture would come to an abrupt end?"

¹⁵ Once I was talking to a Dalit friend of mine while driving somewhere: You give a car to a Dalit, and he becomes a brahmin driver. The change has to be more radical because the issue is much deeper.

¹⁶ In 1992 I asked a high official of the UN agency for development, How many official and NGO-submitted development projects have been thought through and written in the vernacular languages of the people to be developed? "None," was his answer.

¹⁷ See Rizvi (1978/1982).

Religion, to be sure, is an outlet. Without the consolation of religion, many people would not survive; yet with it, passivity and resignation may take over. Muslim self-confidence and Hindū tolerance often produce resignation rather than serenity and a balanced outlook. Hindū piety and Christian concern for the neighbor often generate sectarian factions in lieu of a more mature spirituality. Sikh sense of purpose and Hindū vagueness often beget irritation. This is far from any theoretical mutual fecundation; instead it represents a sense of frustration that is often clothed in cynicism, selfishness, or utter indifference.

Let me try to be a little more specific.

Some Statistics

I "indulge" in such details in the footnotes to show the awareness of a responsible press. Additionally, in compiling these data I respond in advance to those who complain about "prophets of doom." The different dates of many footnotes show how the severity of the situation is growing in geometrical proportions.

India is developing, and allegedly developing well.¹⁸ It has plenty of cars, electronic gadgets, appliances and new factories; there is no lack of food; fancy shops and fast-food restaurants are springing up in the great cities. A technological boom is underway. Indeed, India is part of the 10 percent (some say 8 percent) of the most powerful industrial nations in the world.¹⁹ It has the third largest military in the world.²⁰ One hundred and fifty million people have begun their long march on the road to technology. They may still be clumsy in their new role, but tourists (11 lakhs in 1987) and official visitors are overwhelmed by the rapid "improvement" of such an enormous amount of people.²¹ The newspapers are full of the latest advertisements,²² not excluding the most tempting ads for cigarettes.²³ Certainly, there are traffic jams in the cities, and air pollution and noise pollution are well above tolerable

¹⁸ The notes of this section are a tiny selection of mainly Indian sources from the past few years to give an idea of the complexity of the problems. I have preferred the press to books, in order to show the relatively low impact of the mass media when information has crossed the saturation point.

¹⁹ *India Today*, November 30, 1983, 107, classifies India as being among the top fifteen or so industrial nations in the world—which amounts to our 10 percent. See Weid (von der) & Poitevin (1978), p. 11, where it is spoken of as the tenth industrial power in the world.

²⁰ Lanson (1995), p. 9.

²¹ Ernest Stern, managing director of the World Bank, while in Madras (February 1993) was all praise and flattery in relation to the country's achievements. See his interview in *The Hindū*, February 23, 1993.

²² Unfortunately an increasing number of advertisements do not conform to the code of conduct laid out for "Advertising"; quite the contrary. "They distort facts, mislead the public with false exaggerated claims often without even offering a hint of the product's quality. In the end, their sole purpose seems to confuse and intimidate the consumer into buying through vulgar and suggestive themes" (Bhatia [1984], 28ff.). See Bhaskaran (1990) for a survey and a field study on the subject with pertinent queries: "Should an advertisement aim only at selling a product? Does it not also have an obligation toward the consumer to not mislead with falsehoods and suppressed facts? Is it right that it exploits women and children?"

²³ An unverified source has assured me that in view of the decline of smoking in the West, as result of conscientization, U.S. tobacco companies spent \$1.2 million in 1982 alone on the most refined psychological propaganda aimed at the so-called Third World. And, apparently, it paid off. In his official visit in January 1993, British prime minister John Major was accompanied by the director of a British tobacco firm "with the purpose of exporting cancer and lung diseases," as the British (not the Indian) parliament complained.

levels;²⁴ corruption is still rampant and on the increase, but we are told that "this is the way things are done. . . ." This is the way things are done if you have enough energy—and unlimited sums of money. English-medium schools are mushrooming, accompanied by a constant rhetoric in favor of the vernacular languages. "Otherwise how can our children get the best and perhaps only available jobs?" "Missionaries" are frowned upon, yet Christian schools are in high demand. It is a great asset to be a "convent-educated girl." We must keep in mind that India has the third largest English publishing industry in the world.

The ecological perspective of the earth is increasingly deteriorating.²⁵ Daily newspapers as well as bimonthly and monthly magazines tell us in no uncertain terms how Mother Earth has been mutilated, forests mercilessly devastated,²⁶ hill resorts robbed of their beauty,²⁷ a green island denuded,²⁸ rivers highly polluted,²⁹ and people deeply affected by the process.³⁰

²⁴ Delhi's automobile pollution is among the worst in the world. "Delhi has one vehicle per 10 persons. Thanks to the highest per capita income it has one car, jeep or station-wagon per 50 persons against the national average of one per 800, and the highest travel of 2.6 vehicle kilo miles per day person. . . . Size to size, Indian vehicles emit seven times more pollutants than Japanese vehicles and five and a half more times than American vehicles" (Dutt [1984], p. 49). According to a survey carried out in major urban centers, the noisiest metropolis is Calcutta, where even in the residential areas the sound-level exceeds eighty decibels (*The Statesman*, October 18, 1990). The situation has worsened considerably since then.

²⁵ See the Geo2000 (1999) report of the UNED for alarming data.

²⁶ To give just a few random examples. On deforestation in Madhya Pradesh, see Khandekar (1984), pp. 102ff.: "The fraud has been going on for more than two decades. There are no estimates to indicate its size or volume, but it is known for certain that millions of trees have been cut and villagers—predominantly tribals—have been swindled out of crores of rupees by contractors, officials and politicians who have fattened on the spoils." From the same state an *ādivāsī*, N. Netam, member of Parliament, says, "The extent of deforestation can be gauged from satellite pictures, which shows that 4 percent of the forest—18,000 sq. km in area—has been destroyed in just 7 years. During the last 10 years the forest cover in the State has come down from 1.85 lakh sq. km to 90,200 sq. km" (*The Hindū*, September 8, 1985).

²⁷ It is a sad and widely known fact that the hill stations are fast losing their beauty and peace due to a spate of constructions. See S. Sen (1984), pp. 160ff., on Darjeeling; Dutt & Kapoor (1984), pp. 130ff., on Mahabaleshwar, and *The Hindū*, April 3, 1987, on the decline of Nainital. Regarding the deep concern for the Nilgiris, see Alvares (1988), p. 46; for Ooty, "A Paradise in Distress," see Padmanabhan (1990), pp. 58–71; for "The Declining Kodai," see Balasubramanian (1990), pp. 75–81; and for the ravaged tiny Kodagu (Coorg), see Ramachandra (1988/2).

²⁸ Even Nhava Island, near Mumbai harbor, has not been spared. The Oil & Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) has established one of its bases there, which has led to the tragic devastation of the lush green island. See Pandit & Goenka (1984), pp. 64ff.

²⁹ "To cite some examples, in Tamil Nadu, the tanneries in Vaniambadi area, North Arcot district, have ruined over 4600 hectares of land in which over 2000 wells have become saline. The factories at Tungabhadra river like the Gwalior Silk Manufacturing company emit so much untreated effluence that the fish-yield has declined by 75 percent, and is causing skin and respiratory diseases. Similarly, 12 million liters of effluence per day from over 700 textile processing units along the Bandi River in Rajasthan have made the river water unsuitable for irrigation, leading to crop failures in many villages along the river. Similar is the case of Dhrangadhra Chemical Water in Gujarat and Kesoram Rayon Factory in Calcutta" (Wilfred [1988], p. 57; see also Khandekar [1985], pp. 133ff.; Menon (1991), 118ff: "Woes of a river—The Cauvery faces degradation," due to the sixty urban centers, some highly industrialized in her basin).

³⁰ See Santhanam (1985), pp. 136ff., on the dreadful effects of dust on the quarry workers employed in the 110 stone crushers on the Delhi-Faridabad border. See also Lakshman (1985) on the second

The Himalayas suffer not only from extended deforestation³¹ but also the detrimental consequences of limestone quarries; landslides have destroyed valleys, villages, and people.³² From north to south one hears a constant, painful, and unanimous cry from Men and Nature;³³ wildlife is also endangered,³⁴ yet the cries of the people are unheeded.³⁵

As long as the West can pay out the dollars needed to heal the wounds caused by the harmful side effects of "modernization," we can continue to pretend there is a way out of our predicament. Instead of going to a tea shop to talk and gossip we can go to the cinema³⁶ or, even better, to a "video bar," and lose ourselves in the murmurs and alluring images of a TV screen.³⁷

There is, of course, a price to pay in all this. There is a typical reaction that is commonly heard, however: Let us be frank: were not the American Indians decimated as the United States developed Westward? Did not the industrial revolution in England and elsewhere begin with hunger salaries, child labor, and the like? The villages of Italy are deserted; Sicilians and southern Italians have begun to emigrate to the north, allured by the big cities and modern wealth. No one can stop "modernization." Many years ago Gunnar Myrdal predicted what was bound to happen. In his *Asian Drama* he complained of the lack of field-work and indigenous solutions to the problems of the continent, citing Mahātmā Gandhi as one of the few exceptions.³⁸

Let me put it another way. The history of religions, that often neglected field of the study of human experience, shows that in almost every traditional society, and certainly in that of India, human sacrifices were considered propitious for the culmination of any great work. Modern India still has records showing that workers would now and then sacrifice a child to ensure success, for instance, in the building of a bridge.³⁹ Something similar seems

Citizens' Report on the State of India Environment (1984–85) by the Center for Science and Environment relating the extensive damage, injuries, and deaths caused by the chemical industry, especially in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

³¹ In *The Hindū*, August 11, 1985, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, says, "Forest cover on the Himalayas, estimated to be 60 percent of the land area in the beginning of the century, has now dwindled to a quarter of that."

³² Thirty-five percent of the land below 2000 meters was jungle; now less than 8 percent is wooded, according to Jon Tinkles, International Institute for Environment and Development, London (as reported by Santa Barbara [CA] *New Press*, April 6, 1984).

³³ See the striking article of Vijayan (1984), pp. 76ff.

³⁴ See Gosh (1986), pp. 108ff., on the neglect of the largest bird sanctuary at Bharatpur (Rajasthan) and the profound analysis on "Nature and Human Survival" with confirming examples by Wilfred (1988), pp. 55ff.

³⁵ In Bihar, *ādivāsi* people living near the uranium mining and processing ponds complain of the injurious effects of radiation on their health. The Uranium Corporation of India (UCIL) attributes their diseases to other factors, but the villagers, in response, have formed an organization called JOAR (Jarkhand Organization Against Radiation). See Chaltopadhyay & Subramanian (1999), pp. 70–72.

³⁶ See the editorial in *The India Magazine* (June 1984) on film stars as the superheroes and new Gods of modern-day India.

³⁷ In 1975 the former director general of All India Radio, N. Menon, in his Sardar Patel Lecture, New Delhi, announced that India had become "TV conscious." Big cities like Calcutta and Mumbai have a flourishing industry of imported pornographic films, which are shown in private halls at exorbitant prices to allow for the payment of the fines—or bribes—needed for continuing the business.

³⁸ See Myrdal (1968). See also A. S. Ramasamy (1989) reporting on Myrdal's study visit to India in *The Hindū*, December 12, 1989.

³⁹ The well-founded rumors of the case of child sacrifice at the big bridge between Moghulsarai

to be taking place before our eyes, something we would prefer not to see. In ancient times the priest spoke with the voice of heaven and the child had a face. The difference today is that the modern priests, the technocrats, do not explicitly demand such a sacrifice, and therefore none of them are individually responsible for it. Moreover, today the "child" is faceless, just as the "priest" is no longer identifiable but takes the form of an anonymous or transnational corporation. The "child," however, represents the over 500 million starving children worldwide, and dies not instantly but after an interminable period of suffering, despair, starvation, and faint hope that only prolongs its agony as more and more children are born. This is literally a living death, the gradual waning of vitality, intelligence, and the capacity to work and react. Undoubtedly, moreover, the consciousness of these children has been deadened to the fact that they are being victimized. But by whom? No one knows. The infection is everywhere, yet strangely invisible. No one wants it this way, but hardly anyone seems able to avoid it.

This process is well known. Brazil is another blatant example of a great economic, technological, and industrial success that demands the same price: the sacrifice and living death of the greater part of its population.⁴⁰

This is by no means an exaggeration.⁴¹ However, it is not only the present system that is at fault. To be sure, the India of over half a million villages, with its so-called scheduled castes, of which a large number are Dalits, along with *zamindars* (landowners), moneylenders, and common village exploiters, did not and does not paint a rosy picture. I am not defending a Romantic ideal or taking a reactionary stance. Radical change is needed. Revolution may not be the word, but we are certainly in need of a profound transformation. In itself, "modernity" is not a bad thing, nor, for that matter, is "progress." There is no doubt that hygiene, justice, reason, and especially art, that is, *techné* (not technocracy), are urgently needed in India, as in the world at large. It may be argued, therefore, that whereas in the past a great part of India was in rags, today at least the lives of some have improved, a degree of wealth and well-being have filtered in, and there is hope that the rest may also rise.

This argument, however, takes two facts for granted: (1) that the entire country was in this same predicament before, and (2) that conditions for the underprivileged have improved.

This is not true in either case. To begin with, the population explosion has caused the endemic famines to be far more tragic in terms of scope and intensity.⁴² This is also the case with floods and other natural calamities.⁴³ In addition, many of the present crises are the

(which had the greatest railway network in the whole of Asia at that time) and Varanasi across the Ganges were still alive in the 1950s.

⁴⁰ See, for background, Deelen (1980/1981), pp. 385–409.

⁴¹ The bibliography today is overwhelming. For one book on one example, see S. George (1976).

⁴² India's population in 1983 was 730 million (715 million according to *The Hindū*, August 27, 1983, although *Le Monde*, as reprinted in *The Hindū* [September 24, 1983], sets the figure at 730 million) with a birth rate of 16.3 million per annum. In 1987 the population amounted to 780 million. The year 1991 was a census year; according to the final surveys in March 1991 the total population of the country was of 843,930,586 (in *Frontline*, April 13–26, 1991, pp. 33–40). "The billionth Indian has been born. . . ." See Murthy (1999), pp. 89–90, for a well-documented and rather alarming report on "world population."

⁴³ For example, the recurring drought in so many villages and cities is a most painful fact. In summer 1987 around 100 million people in nine states were suffering from an acute shortage of water. There were several reasons for this, such as soil erosion due to dwindling forests, but also utter negligence in irrigation planning. It is known that of the 246 large-scale surface irrigation schemes planned since 1951, only 65 have been implemented; see Bakshi (1987/2), pp. 45–46. And what can be said about

result of the imbalance caused by Westernization. A fundamental distinction must be made between economic poverty (which by no means we condone, much less glorify) and moral misery. In ancient times, for instance, the subanimal conditions of the slums of India's "great" modern cities were practically nonexistent, and there was less difference, and consequently less envy, between people. A large landowner could exploit his people through ruthless intermediaries, but his laborers still had a human face and he needed them to till the land and work for him. A modern tycoon does not have to look at people. He does not, in fact, need people at all; machines do the work for him more efficiently and, once integrated with the System, far more economically.

The traditional justifications for a hierarchical order in society encouraged a certain acceptance of differences and even of inequality, which today we regard as injustice but in the past was to a degree sanctioned by religion. However perverse it may appear to us today, it served to provide consolation. Today this inequality and injustice have become unbearable; the poor have no outlet for their frustration and pent-up anger (rebellions are ruthlessly put down), and this suppressed misery carves into the very soul of the people. Since so few sociologists have entered into this inner sanctuary of the peasant soul,⁴⁴ sociology possesses neither the tools nor the language. You cannot listen to or comprehend the unspeakable and unspoken troubles of an Indian soul simply armed with questionnaires or tape recorders. You will never fathom the depths of a human being who lacks even the most rudimentary elements with which to voice his sufferings. I should say, rather, *her* sufferings, because the women are the main victims in this situation, having been robbed of the little "revenge" they enjoyed in traditional society, such as running the home, playing an instrumental part in the marriages of their children, or subtly using and/or abusing their sex. All this is almost gone today. The destruction of traditional cultural values and mores is fairly advanced.⁴⁵ And "we" are not better off than "them," nor are "they"—once this honeymoon with the so-called higher standard of (technological) living ends—apparently any happier. Western-imported civilization is too alien to fulfill the stirrings of the Indic *psyché*.

More severe than material inertia, which at least can be measured, is the inertia of the mind. The relative success of the first "Five-Year Plans" suggests that the failures, after barely two decades, were simply due to miscalculations or flawed implementations, whereas in actual fact they were the result of the country having taken a wrong turn.⁴⁶

the Indira Gandhi Canal project in Rajasthan—conceived as the world's largest canal project—which should have brought life to the desert? After thirty-two years it is still far from being completed. See Jain (1991), p. 8. Even the evergreen Kerala has been deeply affected in so many places; see K. P. Nair, Venkiteswaran, Venugopal, & R. Madhavan Nair (1987), pp. 33ff. As an extreme example see Farzand Ahmed (1985/1) on the perpetual agony of Kalahandi (Orissa): "Here is a picture of hell, there is no food, no water. For 20 agonizing years no-one has come to help. . . . Two out of every three children die in infancy. . . . Women have now begun to abandon and sell their children because they can no longer afford to feed them" (52ff.).

⁴⁴ There are, of course, outstanding exceptions; to quote Srinivas (1979) in his own words, "As my field work progressed I began to view the village and its environs more like a native than an outsider" (p. 333). The whole of chapter 11 is in this vein and worth reading. Fortunately, contemporary vernacular literature comes to the rescue of the indigenous soul.

⁴⁵ "Delhi—A Major Transit Point for Trafficking in Women" runs an article of *The Hindu*, February 8, 1988, with staggering figures (including ten thousand children under age sixteen kidnapped to meet the demand in U.P. alone).

⁴⁶ At the end of the British Rāj, India was in dire poverty. In 1929 the per capita income was Rs 282, and by 1950 it had fallen to Rs 249—both in rupee value of 1948. In 1965 the figure had risen

The idea that what is considered the modern standard of living can be universalized is merely wishful thinking. There is simply not enough energy or raw material to achieve this. The success of technology is built on the fact that only the elite are able to own a car, travel by plane, read a large newspaper, or have a refrigerator and air-conditioning. The statistics are unequivocal: 98 percent of scientific research, 91 percent of all exports and 85 percent of all armaments are controlled by a handful of agencies belonging to the 30 percent segment of the world population that constitutes the industrialized countries. These countries consume 94 percent of all copper and aluminum, 78 percent of all fertilizers, and 87 percent of the total world energy. 6 percent of the world population (in the United States) alone uses nearly 40 percent of the global resources.⁴⁷

If every country in the world had the same paper consumption as the United States, in two years there would be no trees left on the planet. "Fortunately" a majority of people are "illiterate"! Even if the rich nations wanted to help other countries they could not, given the peculiar mind-set of technological civilization, unless they themselves also benefited from such acts of "charity."⁴⁸ Every action, in fact, must bring profit, and the result, as we know only too well, is that the rich become richer and the poor poorer.⁴⁹ According to the 1990 statistics, 29.9 percent of the Indian population lives below the poverty line.⁵⁰ The share in world trade, for example, on the part of non-oil-exporting countries has steadily dropped from 19 percent in 1960 to 15 percent in 1970 and 24 percent in the mid-seventies.⁵¹ The world is just beginning to be aware of the deficit in the balance of payments and the general

to 315. Agriculture registered a growth of around 4.5 percent per annum in the first fourteen years of planning. See data *apud* Kurien (1967), pp. 24ff. The downhill regression began afterward, and today the figures are masked by the sky-rocketing "progress" of the so-called upper middle class. The 1989 GNP of India is one of the lowest in the world: \$340, compared to \$650 in Senegal, \$1,099 in Bolivia, and \$1,010 in Botswana (*Sunday Times of India*, October 28, 1990).

⁴⁷ UNCTAD data (*Handbook of International Trade and Development Statistics, Supp. 1973*) as quoted by Parmar (1981), p. 56. The entire issue is dedicated to development, justice, and religion, and is worth reading. Since this period we have had time to correct these inequalities and yet they increased in the years that followed. (The CIA's World Fact Book [last updated May 17, 2011] rates 25 percent of India's population as below the poverty line [2007 est.], *Ed.*)

⁴⁸ Frances Moore Lappe, founder of the Institute for Food and Development Policy (IFDP) and coauthor of *Betraying the National Interest*, has two decades of experience in this field and concurs fully with our data. See *The Hindu*, February 4, 1988, reprinting an article from the *Christian Science Monitor*.

⁴⁹ "From the mid-fifties, non-oil-exporting countries of the Third World have increased the volume of their exports by over 30 percent but their earnings increased by only 4 percent" (Parmar [1981], p. 57). Even accounting for a constant gap between the countries (which in 1976 was 1/127 in the extreme), after twenty-four years (at a growth rate of 36 percent) those who earned an annual income of twenty-six hundred dollars would receive fifty-two hundred dollars, which mathematically corresponds to the same growth rate but is humanly no comparison.

Much of this is admirably summed up by Sheth (1983), p. 2: "The global trends are clear: increasing dualism in the human community caused by an accentuation of poverty, inequity and exploitation; global economic crisis, threatening the life chances, even physical survival, of millions of human beings; militarization of global economy, technology and industrial R & D; growing militarization of major polities and regimes the world over; accentuation of the repression of and atrocities on the poor and deprived; brutalization of the wielders of power at the local level, aided and abetted by both national and international elites and by a defensive and hardening world capitalism."

⁵⁰ See A. Mukherjee (1991), pp. 30ff.

⁵¹ See Parmar (1981), p. 57.

increase in foreign debts.⁵² The trend continues unabated.⁵³ What has until now only occurred between countries will begin to emerge within the countries themselves.⁵⁴

A century ago 70 percent of the workforce in the United States was employed in agriculture. Today it is only 3 percent, yet this 3 percent has the power to use food to gain huge profit and control.⁵⁵ If poverty increases, however, so do military expenses;⁵⁶ the relative budget amounts allocated to armaments and education are indeed revealing.⁵⁷ The situation is drastic, especially in the villages.⁵⁸

⁵² See the data in *ibid.* Patmar was one of the first Indian voices denouncing this fact, which is now, at the dawn of a new millennium, commonly seen as a moral imperative.

⁵³ According to the World Debt Tables of the World Bank (1990), for 1990/1991 the external debt of "developing countries" had climbed to an all-time high of \$1.341 trillion by the end of 1990—6 percent more than the previous year. How can they be called "developing countries" when (in 1988) the net transfer of capital from those countries to the rich nations amounted to \$50 billion? They are "undeveloping" these countries, which contributes to a "blood transfusion from the sick to the healthy." In 1988 India's external debt was \$55 billion; in 1989 it had risen to \$62 billion, and by 1990 it reached \$77 billion. The ratio of India's external debt to the GNP was 15 percent in 1984 and will soar to nearly 30 percent in 1991, predicted *The Hindū* (December 20, 1990). It is instructive to see the further "development." At the time of the new budget *The Hindū* (February 23, 1993) reported that India's external debt had skyrocketed to \$71.11 billion. These are the official figures of the *Economic Survey* for 1992/93. In 1997 Africa paid back two and a half times the debt of 1980, and in 1997 its debt had tripled (*Le Monde diplomatique*, X-1997).

⁵⁴ Even in a country like the United States, there is hunger. As of 1983, almost 20 percent of the population was below the poverty line. Since 1999 this figure has increased considerably.

⁵⁵ See *Epiphany* (Fall 1983): 12.

⁵⁶ Since 1978–79 India has increased its military budget by 15.8 percent every year. In 1951–52 the expenditure amounted to \$28 crores. We read in *The Hindū* (March 1, 1987) that the prime minister allocated Rs 12,512 crores for defense (while the 1986–87 deficit is of Rs 8,285 crores). And it looks as if it will increase further. Former defense minister M. R. Venkataram remarked in Parliament (December 6, 1983) that India "might go in for a nuclear-powered submarine." This became a fact by 1988. The Sixth Plan allocated 9 billion Rs for R & D in space and nuclear programs, against 120 million Rs for all of education (that is 75 times more). See Dh. Sharma (1983), p. 141. And yet in 1993 the country owed \$2.18 billion (in foreign hard currency) for "defense" purchases alone. The main creditor was the former Soviet Union. This appears to be the first time the figures, published in the *Economic Survey* for 1992–93 and *The Hindū* (February 23, 1993), were made public. Besides other arguments concerning military expenditure, it is extremely thought-provoking that India has felt the need to triple her "defense" spending in five years (from around 4,000 crores in 1981–82 to over 12,000 crores in 1987–88). Is the threat really so great and the country so unstable, or is it the overall system that is unrealistic? See Chandrasekhar (1988), p. 18. In 1993–94 the figure soared to 19,180 crores, representing both an absolute and real increase on the previous year, and yet it is argued that the amount is still insufficient (see *The Hindū*, March 1, 1993). This trend, however, is not exclusive to India. In 1986, the six nations of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, or SAARC (which, in fact, are five, since Bhutan has almost no military budget), spent over \$11 billion on its military budget. See *Times of India* (November 19, 1990) on the meeting held in Malé in November 1990.

⁵⁷ Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, at the time of the 1999 elections, gave the following figures on the National Budget of India: 13 percent spent on armaments, 1.5 percent on education, 0.34 percent on health, and 0.12 percent on slum housing (*Vidyajyoti* 63, no. 6 [June 1999]: 411). The proposals of the earlier VII Five-Year Plan were slightly different. The money allocated for education in the VII Five-Year Plan corresponded to 2.8 percent of the total budget (as opposed to over 18.4 percent for military).

⁵⁸ In 174 villages of Madhya Pradesh, writes the chairman of the National Center for Human Settlements, Bhopal (in *India Magazine* 10, no. 11 [October 1990]: 90–91), 95 percent of the people are illiterate (99 percent of the women). In a group of 69 villages only 32 have safe drinking water.

Today the social system is almost unanimously regarded as unjust⁵⁹—the problem lies in finding an alternative.⁶⁰ Given the limited scope of this chapter I can only briefly cover the immensity of the crisis and the difficulties of finding a way out. Without this background, however, all my later reflections would appear unrealistic. The example of Gandhi is significant. On January 26, 1930, which was declared Independence Day, M. K. Gandhi wrote a letter to the Viceroy “pointing out that while the average income of the Indian was only 2 annas, that of the Englishman was Rs 2 a day, that while the pay of the Viceroy of India was Rs 17,000, that of the Prime Minister of Britain was much less, and that 50 percent of India’s national income was spent on the armed forces.”⁶¹

The Example of Mumbai

Moving on from the macro to the micro level we could write one tale of woe after the other. Let us take an intermediate example: the city of Bombay between 1983 and 1990. Against this background we may place the tragedy of the city with its thousands of victims after the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya, on December 6, 1992.⁶² Unfortunately, these events are not anecdotes, but represent a syndrome.⁶³

Certain types of data provide a most exhilarating picture: Mumbai, the great gateway to India, with its prospering restaurants, luxurious hotels, its fifty-five skyscrapers and awe-inspiring sea-reclamation project, is the center of a growing film industry, of business and tourism—a model of modern success, at least from the outside. And these are not mere impressions.⁶⁴

Sixty percent of all international tourists visit Mumbai. The city alone (1.2 percent of the total Indian population and 6 percent of the urban population) pays 80 percent of the sales tax revenue to the government of Maharashtra and 38 percent of income tax to the Center,⁶⁵ 20 percent of the central excise tax and 60 percent of customs duty, and the port processes over 40 percent of the entire maritime trade of the country. Its trade amounts to a total of \$25 billion annually, engaging some 1.5 million traders. The Mumbai textile mills spawn the largest cloth market in the world. The city, Greater Bombay with its 12.57 million people,⁶⁶ sparkles with life (16 million today, compared to 4.1 million in 1941).⁶⁷

But at what price? The city’s density is four times that of New York. Its open spaces are one sixteenth of the minimum accepted norm. More than 4 million of its population

⁵⁹ O. Chinnappa, judge of the Supreme Court, publicly reprimanded the current system in New Delhi (during the Bertrand Russell Study Forum) on August 26, 1983.

⁶⁰ For more technical details, see the five articles in *Religion and Society* 27, no. 3 (September 1980) on “Economic Development and Social Justice.”

⁶¹ Gandhiji was arrested in May of that year (*apud* Chandy [1990], p. 23). It is significant that independent India has widened the gap still further.

⁶² See Noorani (1998), pp. 116–18, reporting the results of the judiciary on the riots of January 1993. See “The Great Betrayal” in *The Week* (December 20, 1992) and the concise and tactful commentary in Larson (1995), pp. 266–77. See also “Ayodhya: Tactical Retreat” in *Frontline* (December 18, 1992) and “Behind the Ayodhya Catastrophe” in *Frontline* (January 1, 1993).

⁶³ See Ram (1993), pp. 22–23.

⁶⁴ Several of the following data are taken from the excellent report by Seth & Kapoor (1983).

⁶⁵ See James (1986), pp. 69ff.

⁶⁶ According to the 1991 census in *The Hindū*, March 25, 1991.

⁶⁷ According to mongabay.com, the population of Mumbai in 2008 was 19,530,000. http://www.mongabay.com/cities_pop_01.htm (*ed.*).

are slum dwellers or pavement squatters.⁶⁸ These people come to the city from all over the country; over one hundred thousand people every month enter Mumbai from the villages, and most of these have left their home in the countryside where they lived in utter poverty.⁶⁹ They seek first and foremost a job, and to secure one they are willing to live anywhere and face any hardship. They are an integral part of the city and indispensable to its functioning: construction laborers, textile workers, carpenters, domestic servants, sweepers. And yet, "for every job that we are now creating in the big cities, at least 20 to 50 could be created in the rural areas."⁷⁰ The inhuman and tragic aspect of their situation is that although these former peasants serve the wealthy, helping to build their fancy residences, hotels, and skyscrapers, they themselves have no decent housing and are living in subhuman conditions. Insurance, compensation for accidents or death, secure employment, indemnification, hygienic conditions, or even dialogues with their employer are inconceivable notions. Their conditions are intrinsically related to those of the rural poor.⁷¹ It is the national economy that forces the villagers to migrate to the city.⁷² And those who are lucky enough to have a roof over their heads live in the most horrifying conditions: in 1980, 78 percent of the families were living in one-room tenements (normally twelve by twelve feet). Twenty-five percent of the families are composed of six to nine persons.⁷³ The total water available in the slums, when they are not flooded by monsoons, is less than four gallons per day, that is, one eighth of the required minimum.

⁶⁸ The *Indian Express* (March 22, 1985) reports that the Rajya Sabha was informed that 20 million people are living in slums in the country and gives the figure of 4.3 million for Mumbai. Yet it is difficult to assess the exact number of a fluctuating population. One reads in *The Hindū* (October 25, 1985) that according to one estimate of the Planning Commission, 32 million to 40 million people lived in urban slums in 1981. In 1989, 52 percent of the Mumbai city population lived in slums; see Vijapurkar (1989/2), p. 79. In 1990 the slum dwellers of the same city were 5 million (D'Monte, 1990). And this in spite of a 20-point program dated July 19, 1984, by the Ministry of Work and Housing. K. N. Panikkar, professor of modern history at the J. N. University, Delhi, gives the figure of slum dwellers as "over 60 percent" (1998), p. 2.

⁶⁹ Many young girls from the villages and the hills are brought to the city and forced into prostitution. There are fifty thousand prostitutes in Mumbai, of which 20 percent are minors; see Therukattil (1987), p. 389, quoting P. Singh (1987), p. 10.

⁷⁰ Kapur (1999) quoting a prior study from 1975 by the author.

⁷¹ See the review of A. Parwardhan's remarkable documentary film *Bombay, Our City*, in *Manushi* (May–June 1985), pp. 45ff. and the interview with the same in *Manushi* (July–August 1986), pp. 16ff., where he says, "The film 'Bombay, Our City' is, in a broader sense, not just about slum dwellers in Bombay but about the economy that polarizes the rich and poor." In "The Slum World" in *Swaraj* (June 28, 1958), Rajaji had previously written, "We live in slums in Madras. The wise ones who live in Delhi, and whose pity is great, dislike our ugly thatched roof huts and threaten to send us back to our villages. . . . Have they ever gone into or seen our own huts in our villages? Do they imagine they are so many 'home, sweet homes'? We have no water there, no drainage, underground or over ground, no lights at night, no sanitation service. . . . If a slum is removed from your sight it settles somewhere else. What poets you are to imagine that what is not seen has been extinguished! Do you know we prefer to live on the slope of a dirty drain in Madras because we get work and send money home for the wretched ones whom we have left there?" (*apud* R. Gandhi [1984], p. 271). That is why many of the slum dwellers are single men. See Tully & Masani (1988), p. 67.

⁷² Six lakhs of new people from the countryside stream into the five largest cities of India every month.

⁷³ Data from Gracias (reproduced in the *Sunday Standard* [August 10, 1980]). The problem is endemic to modern India. Forty-one percent of all Indian families live in one room. In 1970 there were 102.4 million households but only 18.7 million houses (that is 83.7 million short). In the Kalbadevi district 10,500 persons are living in one hectare (Vijapurkar [1989/2], pp. 78ff.).

Not only are the slum dwellers' living conditions subhuman,⁷⁴ but they also live in constant fear of their dwelling being denounced as an "illegal structure" and demolished. This is exacerbated by the well-known fact that the authorities in charge of the so-called resettlement are totally unmindful of the immense harassment to which they subject the people. There is an ongoing struggle, in fact, for "the protection of the right to shelter."⁷⁵

In addition, there is rampant corruption, not only among the higher echelons of the society but also in the slums. Due to their insecure living conditions slum-dwellers are vulnerable and exposed to all sorts of influence and crime. The slums are ruled by slumlords, mainly well-known smugglers, along with their political accomplices.

Due to its hundreds of factories Central Mumbai is known as the "smoke city." After the Bhopal tragedy, the government and the citizens realized that the sixteen hundred tonnes of pollutants released in the city daily could lead to an even greater disaster.⁷⁶

India also has one of the highest records of road accidents in the world.⁷⁷ In Mumbai alone, four people die every day in road accidents, while the number of those who are merely injured is much higher. Transportation is a nightmare.⁷⁸ The Western Railway runs 750 trains daily between Churchgate and Virar. During peak hours trains run every two minutes, carrying 3 lakh passengers every three hours. Trains built to carry nine hundred passengers now carry three thousand, many of them hanging out of the doors. Three million people pass through Churchgate Station every day. As for road transport, every day 2,049 single-decker, double-decker, and trailer buses carry 36.11 lakh commuters.⁷⁹ One cannot help but wonder what kind of human project justifies the need for such mass transport? Are these humans, who are supposed to be separate microcosms, each a center of the universe, or are they ants that we merely call "humans"? What we must call into question is not the efficiency of transport and the proper technology for the smooth management of daily commuters, but

⁷⁴ See Bhargava (1987).

⁷⁵ Some years ago in Mumbai, after the demolition of an entire colony, when negotiations with the government failed, some slum dwellers began an indefinite hunger strike. After refusing to yield to the government's wishes they were eventually granted, thanks to the large support their cause raised, the right to settle on private land with a lease of ninety-nine years. They named their new permanent site "Sangarsh" (Struggle) (see Vanita [1986], pp. 16ff.). Also deserving of mention is PROUD (People Responsible Organization of United Dharavi), which operates in the largest slum in Mumbai and Asia. The mission of this unique community enterprise is to combat and improve slum conditions. See Patel & D'Souza (1988).

⁷⁶ In fact, in March 1985 in Chembur, a former green picnic spot, a thousand people complained of the effect of "ammonia" gas leakage from the prestigious RCF government-owned fertilizer company (see *The Hindū*, September 8, 1985). In the "smoke city," the industrial workers suffer permanently from tuberculosis and various pulmonary diseases. See the comprehensive study on Mumbai's main factories by Jagannath Dubashi (1985/1), pp. 74ff.

⁷⁷ See R. Ramakrishnan (1985), senior deputy director (Designs), Ministry of Transport, on "Accidents and Damages in 9 Metropolitan Cities of India" and "Accident Cause" with charts. According to the police data for 1989 in Delhi, which has 1,580,450 cars, 1,581 people died in traffic accidents (7,377 were injured). In Chennai, 530,197 cars caused 226 deaths (2,158 injuries). There is one accident for every 220 cars in Delhi and every 95 cars in Chennai.

⁷⁸ "On average, according to unofficial estimates, a person spends 22 percent of his or her waking hours in commuting" (see Vijapurkar [1988/1]).

⁷⁹ See James (1986), pp. 69ff. Besides, Mumbai suffers from an acute lack of parking space. In Nariman Point an average of fifty thousand vehicles enter this business center during the day, but there are parking facilities for about twelve hundred cars. As a remedy the government plans to reduce progressively the number of taxis from thirty-four thousand to twenty-six thousand. See Vijapurkar 1988/1.

the underlying assumption that a humane, mature, and cultured human community needs such monstrous megalopolises.

It is not surprising that Mumbai is one of the noisiest cities in the world, to the extent of affecting mental balance and creating permanent psychic damage.⁸⁰

All this continues in spite of the "Save Bombay" campaign and all the ecological, civic, and social movements that proliferate in this city, perhaps more than anywhere else in India.⁸¹ This shows that the problem lies in the very nature of the enterprise itself. Far from creating a heaven or a new age in India, technology seems to have brought only short-term advantages and only for a tiny minority.⁸²

Some years have elapsed since the foregoing data were collected. The situation has worsened. The boom has continued for a few, but for the majority there seems to be no way out. For lack of proper planning life is sheer chaos.⁸³ The specter of Bhopal is a genuine reason for fear.⁸⁴ "Can Bombay be saved?" is not a sensationalist report,⁸⁵ and the controversy regarding the "dereservation scandal" has triggered a series of studies showing that there will be no improvement unless the change is much more radical.⁸⁶

It is neither diplomatic nor agreeable to dwell on such gloomy figures. At the same time, however, we can no longer ignore them or, as is often the case, dismiss them as circumstantial or provisional. After over fifty years since Independence, most citizens are suspicious about the cause of the crisis, which is rooted in something deeper than the mere miscalculations of the Planning Commission or the greed of a few warmongers. The instinctive reaction of many of the upper middle class, therefore, tends to be, "Let us become 'prosperous,' since we at least can afford it." As for the victimized poor, despair is unconsciously replaced by apathy and sporadic outbursts of violence.

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I am not a pessimist, but I would like to overcome the cliché of describing mere appearances and adopting the opinions of the small, although visible and powerful, minorities. I adopt the perspective of 80 percent of the people, who are not able to enjoy the "benefits" of modern technocultures but are mere victims of its fringe disadvantages. This majority is the "material" that makes the "progress" of the others possible. I am not speaking here in the detached language of the philosopher or religious scholar, but in a style that is easily comprehensible to the modern mentality, which prefers figures, examples, and plain descriptions to

⁸⁰ On festival days the noise level can reach as high as ninety decibels. And considering that the decibel is measured according to a logarithmic scale, ninety decibels is actually 106 times more than forty decibels (data from the Mumbai-based SOCLEEN [Society for Clean Environment], September 12, 1983).

⁸¹ See Save Bombay Committee (1987), *Citizens' Report* (second report).

⁸² A further example of the inadequacy of the system is the danger of drug poisoning among the indigenous peoples due to ignorance of modern medicines: "WHO had repeatedly pointed out the danger of the Indian population being bombarded every year with antibiotics worth Rs 400 crore by over one million registered practitioners of indigenous medicine whose acquaintance with the intricacies of microbiology is at best at the nodding level" (*India Today* [November 30, 1983]).

⁸³ See Vijapurkar (1989/1).

⁸⁴ See *Asiaweek* (January 19, 1990), reporting on the reopening at Chembur of the former Union Carbide petrochemical complex (closed in 1985 after the Bhopal disaster). Kisan Mehta, president of the Save Bombay Committee, reminds us that Bombay has a density of forty-five thousand people per square kilometer.

⁸⁵ See *The Week* (April 22, 1990) [editorial].

⁸⁶ See Vijapurkar (1989/2), pp. 78ff.

sociological approaches. Most of us maintain too dispassionate an attitude toward events and facts. We want to be merely "sympathetic" observers, choosing to disregard the fact that we may be part of the very causes of the crisis. Indifference in human affairs requires us to betray our humaneness and to make the most momentous and deleterious of decisions: that of inaction. With such complex problems, in fact, how can we jump into this vast ocean of human events if we do not know how to swim? And yet, how will we ever learn to swim if we continue to refuse to jump in and get wet?

Interludes

There is an awakening in India; independence was not in vain. Undoubtedly, even without the Gandhis, Nehrus, and Jinnahs, the subcontinent would have attained political independence, as have most of the colonies of the European powers. The phenomenon is not exclusively Indian. Decolonization took place in Europe as much as in the colonies. It is a fact, however, that ever since Independence, India has been in constant ferment. While on the micro-level we recognize such anarchic vitality, on the macro-level the picture appears chaotic and bewildering. And yet in this kaleidoscopic picture we can just make out the pattern of a slowly crystallizing *maṇḍala*. If we remain where we are, the image is dismal, but if we view it as an interlude before imminent change, the future appears hopeful.

India has ceased to appear (indeed, it never was) as merely a passive land, accepting everything as the sovereign law of *karma*.⁸⁷

We must overcome this cliché (probably Western), which is so convenient for both rulers and biased "spiritual" individuals (who pride themselves in being tolerant, unworldly, absorbing everything, and so on). On the contrary, India is a land in turmoil, in constant movement. Gandhiji is perhaps its most well-known symbol belying the passive attitude. Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan, along with many others, aroused hundreds of thousands to action, not to mention the recurrent outbursts of communalism, Hindū-Muslim riots, and events like those of Ayodhya and Mumbai in 1992–93. The present-day situation, however, has more ancient roots. Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been a number of important figures: not only Tilak and Gokhale but also Surendranath Banerjea, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Narayana Guru, and many others who equally symbolize this Indian awareness. Let us look at few contemporary instances.

For heuristic reasons we may distinguish three main reactions of contemporary India to the present situation. These three reactions, which are not mutually exclusive but interpenetrate and complement each other, are technocratic revolution, inner resistance, and rebellious protest.

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Before we venture into this field, a sobering remark must be made. Modern India is a nation-state, but it is not a nation. It is a conglomerate of nations. "India has never had a real sense of nationalism," wrote R. Tagore long ago.⁸⁸ And even today after Independence and the centralizing tendency of the Central Government, Kerala is not Tripura, nor is Maharashtra Bengal. What is said about one state may not apply directly to another. Since modern India is our case study, however, I am obliged to simplify.

⁸⁷ See the field study by Poitevin (1975), p. 251, being an "Enquête sur une population étudiante indienne." One of the conclusions reads, "Une énorme capacité d'endurance qui ne saurait plus se prolonger indéfiniment."

⁸⁸ Tagore (1980), p. 105.

Information Age Enthusiasm and Western Education

These two comments may sum up the official position of the country:

India's endemic poverty and all our national problems will be solved if we succeed in creating a welfare system on a socialistic pattern according to the model of a middle way between the liberal and the communist ideologies represented until recently by the two superpowers.

India still officially follows a policy of political non-alignment, and is eager for the country's internal policy to reflect a balance between the private and the public sectors, between industry and agriculture, and between a multiparty political structure and the local autonomy of the Union States.⁸⁹

There is a slogan that says,

India has engaged herself in a way of no return. We have to modernize and this implies and demands Westernization in the basics and maintaining a certain indigenization on the accidentals. The Indian subcontinent missed the industrial revolution. We should not allow her now to miss the electronic transformation of society, while keeping our own identity not only as a separate nation, but also with a certain "Indian" style of doing things.⁹⁰

Yet efficiency does not allow many styles of banking, running an industry, participating in the stock market, or in the modern automation of social life. Once in the system, one has to abide by the rules of the game.

We may have colorful local TV programs but the *doordarshan* has to follow the technological imperative, the financial dictatorship, and the exigencies of the market.

To the question as to whether there is incompatibility between traditional ways of life and modernization, the standard answer is that the values of modern science and technology are neither Western nor Eastern but universal.⁹¹ It is very obvious, however, that the 20 percent of the population who are financially well off believe this, but it is equally obvious that their living conditions have improved thanks to the technocratic system.⁹²

⁸⁹ Yet is not this socialist pattern still a dream? "That much abused word [socialism], which found its way into the Constitution only at the end of the third decade of Independence [Forty-Second Amendment of 1976], has for a long time been nothing more than a fig-leaf. In truth, India has never been socialist unless socialist consists merely of having a large public sector and controls, and an unimpressive net of welfare measures which pale before what really socialist countries have and aren't even a patch on what out-and-out capitalist countries have put together" (*India Today* [May 31, 1985], 7). Since the fall of the USSR, the mask is off and capitalism is rampant.

⁹⁰ "Removal of corruption at all levels in public life, use of modern technology to help farmers achieve greater results and the need to keep cultural heritage in view while modernizing the country, were the three guidelines that the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, proposed today as the blueprint for progress" (*The Hindü*, August 3, 1985).

⁹¹ See Panikkar 1984/26; 1988/33; 1996/55.

⁹² Four Indian firms are among the world's five hundred largest corporations outside the United States (see *The Hindü*, August 23, 1985). These firms undoubtedly provide a high standard of life for their top executives, and sometimes higher than average conditions for their workers, but their greater competitiveness leaves the rest of the population worse off than before. A tractor makes a family rich, but leaves twenty other families without work.

The officially active Indian nation is an inner state of 150 to 200 million people who enjoy a "prosperous" life despite the hardships of competition and the need to sacrifice the "Romantic" ideals of the past.⁹³ We know now that for a country to become rich in a global competitive technocratic market, a substantial part of its citizens has to become poorer or, at best, the customers of the rich.⁹⁴

The slogan here is education. In spite of the lip service paid to traditional values the emphasis is on information relating to technological know-how, not only in the so-called scientific disciplines but also in social sciences and humanities at large.⁹⁵ The aim of higher education, for instance, is no longer that of creating "babus" for the subservient echelons of "modern life," as during British rule, but of producing skilled laborers capable of finding employment in the national market and, as experience proves, abroad also.⁹⁶ This so-called brain-drain of India's skilled workers and technicians is evidence of the efficiency of the educational system, besides being a sign that the country cannot yet absorb such an amount of expert technocrats and cater to their high standard of living. Not by chance, in fact, have many become medical doctors, specialized engineers, and the like. They demand higher pay. The political establishment strives to create the necessary substructures for them but, except for a few cases of "national interest" (military, upper bureaucracy, and some hard-currency earning enterprises), without much success. Indian specialists continue to leave the country.

By and large, the theory and the praxis of education means Western or technological information. The universities, colleges, and secondary schools are Western in orientation. I am not saying this is good or bad; I am simply stating a fact. The curricula, the ways of thinking, and usually the language are all of Western origin. Consequently, the education of the masses, the village children, has been neglected.⁹⁷ Though the country has sometimes supported indigenous studies such as Sanskrit and Ayurvedic medicine this has only been for purposes of "higher education," with very little or no impact on the country.

⁹³ It has been said that "11 crore of its [the country's] people have a standard of living comparable with those in developed countries" (Rajan Guha [1991], pp. 48ff.).

⁹⁴ See Sridhar (1999/2), pp. 89–95, and Reddy (1999), pp. 97–104, as an example of the Hi-Tec-City built in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, financed by the World Bank (Rs 1,500 crores), which will be "Harsh on the poor" (Sridhar).

⁹⁵ T. S. Eliot's first verses of his choruses for *The Rock* come to mind:

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance.

...

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the Wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

⁹⁶ The 1949 Radhakrishnan Commission on Education aimed to produce the "good man." Today the emphasis, in the words of Moonis Raza, vice chancellor, Delhi University, is on the "useful man" (see *The Hindū*, February 16, 1988). See special feature: computer education and training, "A flourishing industry"; "Taking the computer to school"; "New technologies on offer," Sridhar (1999/1), pp. 92–104, and Gosh (1999), pp. 101–2, on "Sensory addiction."

⁹⁷ See Acharlu (1986), pp. 357ff., on the concept of a model school for the rural children, and K. R. Sharma (1987) on the education of tribal children. See Bommai on the failure of our education in his presidential address to the Janata Party in *Frontline* (March 2–15, 1991), p. 41. One extremely alarming consequence is the lack of dedicated and competent teachers. Teaching, as a whole, is no more a vocation but has become merely a job, which is increasingly secured through stiff bargaining and bribery (the amount ranging from Rs 25,000 to Rs 100,000). Another is the mushrooming of new colleges, tuition centers, and the like. See Nayar's highly critical comment (1985) on these two negative aspects in Kerala. He also rightly criticizes the lack of physical education.

Except for some specialized schools, artistic education is practically nonexistent in Indian education. Since it cannot provide a livelihood, it is simply disregarded.⁹⁸

There is some concern in the West regarding the influence of Eastern gurus and spiritual practices. We tend to overlook the fact, however, that Western influence on the world in general and on India in particular is a hundred times more pervasive and powerful.

The reaction of the official policy is to accelerate the process of economic transformation, speed up the industrialization of the country, and use education to indoctrinate the people with the values of the technocratic civilization.⁹⁹

The country's official stand makes it sufficiently clear that this is the direction it has chosen, whatever the human cost (as a blatant example, the second heart transplant in the world was carried out in a hospital in India, but the country's hospitals are in a dismal state). India is becoming an industrial world power, but its products can only be competitive because of the low cost of labor or, in other words, the appalling social conditions of the workers.¹⁰⁰

Inner Resistance and Withdrawal

These policies have led to inner resistance and withdrawal, which are not the same as the Gandhian "passive resistance" and "non-cooperation" movement. This withdrawal and disenchantment are sinking into the deepest recesses of the soul until nothing matters except immediate needs and interests. This goes a long way to explain the much-denounced public corruption in India. The present system, ranging from Western democratic ideology and forms of technology to the necessary objectification of reality and individual quantification of modern life, is not compatible with the vast majority of the people. The Indic *psyché* reacts to this situation by offering an inner resistance, which manifests itself in a lack of enthusiasm and commitment. Such a response produces apathetic resignation and inertia while, at the same time, talking at length "how things have to be done," "how the game has to be played," how "the show must go on," and so on. To avoid risking heavy penalties people simply "get by," nurturing an attitude of cynical disinterest. Sociologists agree that most people do not envisage change, and those who are aware that things must change very often lack proper support in bringing it about. Their bitter past experience has shown them that change is often for the worse. The majority of the people simply want to improve their living conditions, their standard of life. Change is a modern category, improvement a traditional symbol, and growth a natural event.

The leaders of around 160 million Dalits and their well-meaning supporters struggle hard to help them change their living conditions and cast off their long-standing stigma.¹⁰¹ Like blacks in North America, however, and unlike the majority of the *ādivāsīs* (known as tribals), who struggle to keep their separate identity, what most people want above all is to improve their chances of entering the mainstream of the country.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ With the exception of a few private initiatives, only the rich can afford special classes in art, which is viewed as a hobby rather than an essential part of cultivating the total personality. Significantly, 50 percent of the already meager budget on education goes to institutes of higher learning.

⁹⁹ The newspapers are full of advertisements designed to allure. In addition to the many computer centers and courses promising to lead students to a bright future, families are also assured that a home computer is the answer to all their needs regarding the children's education, household management, and everything else.

¹⁰⁰ The average net benefit of the most representative chemical companies in India is 16 percent.

¹⁰¹ The Dalits (downtrodden, depressed) broadly comprise the so-called scheduled castes, who were formerly known as untouchables or outcasts.

¹⁰² Recently, one Dalit leader from Panjab, Kanchi Ram, launched a new political party called

The cliché of Indian apathy or Eastern fatalism is an oversimplified misreading of the situation. If one touches a vital nerve of the Indic soul its people will react as violently as any other, but it must be something that is perceived as ultimate, otherwise it is not worth the effort. Language is such a thing, and so are caste and religion.¹⁰³ Communal riots are not simply events of the past. They can happen anywhere in the country, at any time and for various reasons. The year 1990 saw violent riots spread throughout the country, particularly in the north and the east, because of Hindū-Muslim antagonism linked to the Ramjanma-bhumi-Babri Masjid controversy at Ayodhya, which culminated in the violent destruction of the mosque on December 6, 1992. Anger over the Mandal Commission and the reservation of jobs for the "socially and educationally backward classes" reached alarming proportions.¹⁰⁴

Prophets are both the offspring of the culture that nourished them and personalities who have transcended the status quo. This is why they oppose and denounce the main trends of their own specific tradition. It is no coincidence that prophets are persecuted by their own people. The reason India has prophets of nonviolence is precisely because the people are violent and need them to speak out against the culture's weakness.

Most traditional religions, especially Asian dharmic conceptions of life, tend to consider this material world as temporary, fleeting, if not downright illusory. In this context, therefore, if external things do not go according to our wishes and expectations, it is more realistic for us to adapt and seek inner contentment than to fight a losing battle.

Not all the causes for inner resistance, however, are strictly religious. Many believers today try to reinterpret the role of religion as fostering change and even revolution. Another subtle cause of inner resistance is an often unconscious mistrust of developments that are vaguely perceived as a threat to the entire fabric of traditional life. Advertising agencies try to convince the public that paradise is being created with the products of big industry. Yet something is clearly lacking in a technological product when in some cases up to 70 percent of its net value is spent on seducing potential buyers.

I see this inner resistance to modernity as a healthy sign of wisdom and not of backwardness, as propaganda would have us believe.

the Bahujan Samaj, which groups together the oppressed outcastes and low castes. "He [Kanchi Ram] vowed to end the rule of the 15 per cent which these three castes [Brahmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas] comprise . . ." (D. Mukerji [1990], pp. 18ff.). Kanchi Ram believes it will gain between 80 and 85 percent of the votes. See Tully & Masani (1988), pp. 77ff. and V. Ramakrishnan (1994), pp. 4ff. One may remember here Shyam Sunder, the fierce promoter of India's Dalit Movement with his formidable Bhin Sena and the short-lived Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra in the mid-1970s (see Shetty [1978] and Weid & Poitevin [1981], pp. 34ff.).

¹⁰³ When Rajagopalachari was premier of the Madras Presidency (1937–39), he had to face staunch resistance and harassment both from the people and the opposition on account of the Hindustani teaching his ministry had introduced in schools (see Rajmohan Gandhi [1984], pp. 18ff.). Nearly half a century later, the issue remains as pressing as ever (see RGK [1986], pp. 8ff.), on the language crisis. In an outburst of violence in Goa, the recognition of Konkani as the official language was one of the major issues (see Madhan Mohan [1987], pp. 105ff.).

¹⁰⁴ See Jethmalani (1990), pp. 64ff. The controversy is a highly crucial issue. The well-known lawyer N. Palkhivala paid a rich tribute to Dr. Ambedkar on his birth centenary celebration: "He gave India a Constitution which guarantees equality to all as its basic feature, and ensures a truly egalitarian society where no class would be unprivileged, underprivileged or privileged on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, dissent, place of birth or residence." On these grounds he challenges the validity of the Mandal report before the Supreme Court (1991) (18ff.). This, however, is the letter of the Constitution, and half a century later a great part of the population remains highly discriminated.

In addition to many other political factors, this skepticism of the Indic soul with regard to exogenous forms of living has also played a central role in the fact that India has not embarked on any of the various radical revolutions that have taken place in Japan, China, Korea(s), and Kampuchea. In short, despite its tendency toward guru worship and the cult of personality, the Indic *psyché* is not messianically oriented.

Here is a case of a conflict of cosmologies, as I will explain later. Myths are like clouds; they do not clash unless they are overcharged and overstretched, and then they become ideologies that clash, unleashing bolts of lightning. Another name for this process is *conscientization*, a raising of conscious and self-conscious awareness within an emerging myth that becomes surreptitiously instilled. This is our third type of reaction.

Protest and Rebellion

An increasing number of people in India today are actively opposing the current social configuration, whether through outright civil war, as in the northwest and northeast of the country, or through various protests by students, peasants, Dalits, weavers, lawyers, teachers, or workers. Some of these protests are underground, others are vociferous and visible; some are primarily religious, others have political, social, or intellectual roots. Some are democratic and legal, others contest the very framework of society.

Some of the groups belong to the extreme left and others to the extreme right. The former have Marxist overtones, while the latter represent forms of religious, especially Hindū, revivalism.¹⁰⁵ Others have a predominantly political character (while still being of a religious nature), such as the Sikh revolution in Punjab. Although the established political parties share in the dynamism of the country, they are largely marginal to the protest movements, since the latter challenge the very ground rules of modern India, and thus the framework of the political parties themselves.

Political Opposition

The Republic of India has adopted the Western model of democracy, as if it had no memory of autochthonous political approaches. This has been possible due to the lack of genuine Indian leadership (except for Gandhiji and a few others) and the profound impact of the British Rāj. The British followed a pragmatic policy that has remained the pattern for independent India. They did not interfere with autochthonous institutions; they simply implanted their own basically effective administration. The British administration has now been taken over by Indians. The Indian leaders believed, like the British, that once they made the technocratic and individualistic system work, all the rest would fall into place.

There is, however, one substantial difference. Whereas British foreign rule could coexist with more or less autochthonous local bodies, once the Indian state was created, local autonomies lost their *raison d'être* ("After all, we too are Indians"). Centralization and homogenization began, and only the myth of coexistence remained.

In the new democratic society the Constitution is the recognized deity. It allows for democratic opposition, and there has indeed been opposition, although the Congress Party

¹⁰⁵ See the religious-political *ekamātā-yajña* organized at the end of 1983 by the Vishva Hindū Parishad (which at that time claimed 350,000 members) for "national integration"—mainly of the 550 million Hindūs—under the spell of *Bhārata-mātā* or Mother India worshiped as a new Goddess. See also the events around the Ayodhya episode of December 1992. The reaction has increased in more recent years, and hindutva has become an ideology.

(the protagonist of Independence and Partition), except for brief periods, has continued to rule the country.

In spite of the dark moments of Indira Gandhi's Emergency and notwithstanding increasing corruption and even, according to some, the "criminalization of politics," it must be said that India is not a dictatorship and opposition parties generally recognize the Constitution.

There is no point in dwelling here on the ups and downs of Indian politics or the increase of politico-religious fundamentalism. The fact of the matter is that the Constitution allows for opposition and even protest.

In spite of many theoretical loopholes, practical abuse, and demoralizing corruption, India's political system has produced a relatively stable way of life, maintained a fair degree of order in most of the country, avoided open civil wars, and offered a framework of civility. As the situation deteriorates, however, for the reasons I have already begun to point out, the true question is, How long can this order be preserved?

Social Challenges

The social situation is threatened by injustice of all sorts. Food, water, housing, education, and more recently, ecology are the major concerns.

Let us take a look at the ecological situation.¹⁰⁶ The victory of the Silent Valley controversy is a good example of this growth in conscientization.¹⁰⁷ Scientists have also compiled a report on the Nicobar and Adaman Islands, where the process of modernization has proved to be extremely harmful both to the local aboriginals and to the highly vulnerable ecosystem.¹⁰⁸ The Chipko (tree-hugging) movement led by Chardi Prasad Bhatt began in the Himalayas in the 1970s as an attempt to prevent contractors from cutting down the trees.¹⁰⁹ Sunderlal Bahaguna was one of Bhatt's heroes.¹¹⁰ Inspired by the Chipko, the Appiko movement in

¹⁰⁶ See the different references to ecology in part I of this study. These are all related to forms of protest, few of which have brought about such a victory as that of the Doon Valley. For several years the Doon Valley had been robbed of its natural splendor due to the quarry operations. "This is the first time that ecology has been given due consideration in our legal system," wrote Dr. J. Bandyopadhyay, who prepared the report on the Natural Resource Utilization in Doon Valley. See "Restoring the Lost Splendour," by the agriculture correspondent, *The Hindü*, September 8, 1985.

¹⁰⁷ We refer to a hydroelectric project in Kerala in one of the few virgin jungles of India, which would have submerged 830 hectares of tropical forest with its unique specimens of fauna and flora. After years of controversy, the then prime minister (Indira Gandhi) decided to shelve the project. See Vijayan (1982), pp. 28ff., where the author quotes the *Atharva-veda* XII.1.35: "O Purifier, let me not pierce thy vitals or thy heart," and comments, "The Rs 120 crores project would have done precisely that. It would have driven a wedge through the Valley's vitals and its heart, for a 10,000-hectare irrigation target and a mere 50 megawatts more of power" (see Parthasarathy [1999], pp. 65–72).

¹⁰⁸ See Appan Menon (1985), p. 73. More recently, governments and industrial lobbies have learned to keep up the ecological appearances and hire experts to rubber-stamp their projects (see *Frontline* [March 26, 1993], p. 62, on the coastal railway in Goa).

¹⁰⁹ See Bhatt's excellent study (1990) on the Chipko Andolan (movement), pp. 20ff.

¹¹⁰ He goes anywhere in the country where nature is threatened by Man and his technology and takes an active part in resistance movements. He was in the Doon Valley after the verdict of the Supreme Court (*The Hindü*, September 13, 1988); he joined the "Save Nilgiris Campaign" (*The Hindü*, December 26, 1988); he was in Kodagu (Coorg) when the controversy arose on the tea plantation project (1988); he joined the protest on the Narmada Valley project (1989). He went on an indefinite fast in December 1989, demanding that the Tehri hydroelectric dam project in the Himalayas be dropped (see P. K. Roy [1990], pp. 77ff.). Many, inspired by him, have started the struggle in their own regions. In 1988 he

Karnataka was launched by local activists in 1983.¹¹¹ There has been steady enthusiasm among the young people for environmental camps¹¹², which is also evident from the many volunteers in the Save the Western Ghats March.¹¹³

The sheer number of protest groups today is revealing. One of the lessons learned in the Emergency of Indira Gandhi some years ago was the realization of how fragile the country was due to a lack of vital substructures. An attempt at dictatorship today would encounter far more opposition. The entire subcontinent is waking up.

Protests are not only directed against injustice, oppression, misguided policies, and corruption, but they also question other aspects of social life.

For example, people are becoming more aware of the deleterious effects of the allopathic medicines produced by the big multinational companies. In recent years there has been increasing discussion about "popularizing Indian medicine" and some positive measures have been taken in that direction by local administrations and private institutions.¹¹⁴ Except in Bangladesh, however, there have been no official decisions on the subject.¹¹⁵ Another important aspect of health care is how to tackle hunger and malnutrition on a local basis. This is not only a matter of government policy but of adequately educating the people. A revolution is urgently needed in this area also.¹¹⁶ The protest against industrialization projects and the relative urbanization arises from an awareness of their highly detrimental effects on general health and mental stability.¹¹⁷ Everything

asked the central government to give full support to the environmentalists' request for an emergency session of the UN Assembly on tropical forests (see *The Hindü*, March 20, 1988).

¹¹¹ Appiko volunteers use *Yakshagana*, the traditional folk theatre of Karnataka, to convey their message, "Harmony with nature for eternal prosperity" (see Venkataramani [1985], pp. 83ff.).

¹¹² See Baskaran (1985). We learn, in the same report, that there are more than two hundred voluntary organizations in the country concerned with environmental protection. Educationists are keen to raise the awareness of students regarding the preservation of forests and wildlife. See the report on the ten-day, one-hundred-kilometer trek in the Nilgiris by a large group of students of the National Service Scheme (NSS) in *The Hindü* (March 19, 1987). A multidisciplinary approach is taught to save forests at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (see *The Hindü*, March 23, 1987). The scientist T. N. Khoshoo (1990) writes about the crucial challenges faced by India and Pakistan in "A Holy War for Ecology." Some informal groups of students like the Group of Rural Activities (Indian Institute of Technology at Powai, Mumbai) have been directly contributing to rural development since 1984 (see *The Hindü*, February 24, 1991).

¹¹³ What the participants reported was extremely alarming: catastrophic ecological damage, acute water and firewood shortage (Gujarat & Maharashtra), reduced soil fertility, declining wild animal population, disappearing medicinal plants, nefarious effects of development projects, and so on (see *The Hindü*, May 26, 1987; February 1, 4, 16, 1988; Vijapurkar [1988/2], pp. 82ff.).

¹¹⁴ See *The Hindü*, November 22, 1985; March 17, 1987; March 29, 1987; August 30, 1989; Surajeet Dasgupta (1989), pp. 109–10.

¹¹⁵ Due to the untiring efforts of Dr. Z. Chowdhury, the government of Bangladesh framed and implemented the National Drug Policy, which banned over three hundred drugs "as useless and injurious to health" (May 1982). In 1972 Dr. Chowdhury founded the Gano Sasthya Kendra (people's health center), a medical complex for the rural poor, near Dhaka (see Haroon [1985]). Since then it has expanded: besides twenty-three self-sufficient units, there is a pharmaceutical branch that manufactures low-cost essential drugs. In 1985 Dr. Chowdhury won the Magsaysay Award for community leadership. So far, only fourteen drugs have been banned by New Delhi (see *The Hindü*, March 11, 1987).

¹¹⁶ See Swaminathan (1985), pp. 96–97, director general, International Rice Research Institute.

¹¹⁷ On August 14, 1985, the Ministry of State for Health warned the Rajya Sabha that the number of people affected by serious mental disorders could rise to 14 million, the main cause being rapid urbanization and industrialization.

is connected. To strive for the conservation of nature is to work toward the well-being of the people.

In addition, consumers in rural and urban areas are becoming increasingly aware of their rights and of the risk of exploitation by the government and industry.

Although the people were encouraged by the Consumer Protection Act (COPRA) of 1986, the overall policies of the government have nevertheless changed little. The capitalistic lobby is still too powerful.

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Let us now look at a few concrete examples of protest in the exploited and oppressed segments of the society, and at other forms of "protest" relating to the various aspects of social life.

Women's Awakening

Barely visible at the time of Independence, and still in its early stages today, the women's movement is growing day by day. Here are a few examples:

An activist women's group in Delhi voices its concern about women and society in the group's magazine, *Manushi*.¹¹⁸

Some women's movements are of rural origin, such as *Stri Shakti*, inspired by the late Acarya Vinoba Bhave, which has branches throughout the country.

The burning issues tackled by activist groups and local women include the dowry system, alcoholism, and various forms of exploitation.¹¹⁹

Increasingly, traditions that cause low-wage girls and women to fall into highly detrimental conditions, both in the villages and in the cities, have been openly exposed by the press, and several bold initiatives have also been publicized.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ The editor, Madhu Kishwar, says,

Manushi has tried to avoid a "ladies" compartment approach to women's issues, that is, confining its concern to problems like dowry, rape, abortion. To limit women's concern to these would be to accept society ghettoization of women, to accept that we are powerless to change and redefine the world. Therefore, *Manushi* attempts to explore and analyze as many as possible of the significant things happening around us, from the point of view of women, particularly women of the oppressed groups and communities. . . . In the last few years, the content of *Manushi* has reflected the fact that the scale of injustice and violation of human rights is rapidly escalating.

See Kishwar (1986), p. 4. The *Manushi* team is bold enough to take a firm position on serious issues. See Kishwar (1984), 10ff., on the Delhi massacres (November 1984) against Sikhs.

¹¹⁹ Nari Nirman, an anti-dowry cell run by young women, was set up in Delhi to help dowry victims and their parents (see *The Hindü*, January 2, 1984); the Crimes Against Women Cells of the Delhi Police recorded 2,344 cases in 1988—some 200 more than in 1987. According to figures released in Parliament, 922 women were burned to death in 1988 for dowry reasons, and there was a 65 percent increase in the number of dowry deaths in the two years from 1986 to 1988. The harassment and murder of young married women by their husbands and in-laws increased manifold after the much publicized amendment in 1984 to the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1951 and again in 1986 (see *The Hindü*, October 15, 1989). In Bangalore a women's group named Vimochana held a seminar on "cashing in on women issues in films" (*The Hindü*, November 22, 1985).

¹²⁰ In September 1987 both the press and women organizations strongly condemned the "Sati" in Rajasthan, which took place despite court orders and a law that banned it 150 years ago. This is the practice in which the young widow follows her husband's body to the funeral pyre and is burned alive

The dedicating of young girls as "devadāsīs" (Karnataka) and "jogins" (Andhra Pradesh) has aroused widespread outrage.¹²¹

We also hear increasingly about the plight of women tobacco workers in Gujarat, their long hours of arduous work in unhealthy, debilitating conditions for less than the minimum salary, and their exploitation by tobacco farmers and factory owners.¹²² Unfortunately, there are numerous such examples.¹²³

On a positive side, the Tamil Nadu Joint Action Council for Women initiated a comprehensive program for the training of female wage workers in the building industry.¹²⁴ Clearly, however, there are many issues aside from wages.¹²⁵

We cannot discuss the subject of women's rights and welfare without mentioning one particularly important name—that of the activist Ela Bhatt, who, defying bureaucratic restrictions and male domination, launched the SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) in 1972.¹²⁶

Meanwhile, an increasing number of upper-middle-class women have put their education to good use and proven their skills in several spheres and professions that are no longer exclusively male-dominated.¹²⁷

Despite some positive trends, however, one cannot be too optimistic. The provisional Census 1991 shows an alarming decline in the sex ratio. According to the Committee on the States of Women in India, "The marginalization of women in the economy, the family, the community and the political process have all contributed to women's growing poverty, hunger and higher mortality in virtually all age groups."¹²⁸

with him. In Rajasthan it is still considered a holy act, and temples are dedicated to the "Satis." See *The Hindū*, September 16, 1987, and *Manushi* 42–43 (1987): 2–34.

¹²¹ "Devadāsīs" and "jogins" are young girls whose life is dedicated to the service of the temple (see *The Hindū*, February 15, 1987), "1000 Girls Dedicated as 'Devadāsīs' in Belgaum District," and on the "jogins" of Nijamabad (February 16, 1987). See also "Prostitutes Claiming Their Rights," in *Manushi* 58 (May–June 1990): 35–36.

¹²² Urged by a lawyer, the Gujarat High Court ordered an inquiry. The report stated, "Appalling is too mild a word to describe the inhuman working conditions of the workers employed in these units. . . . None of the labor laws is in practice implemented by the labor officials, though on paper everything exists" (see Kuruwa [1991]).

¹²³ See Rajalkahmi (1999/2), pp. 87–88, on the exploitation of women workers in the export processing area (NEPR) outside Delhi.

¹²⁴ See Lakshman (1988).

¹²⁵ The All India Democratic Women's Association organized meetings in Tamil Nadu in protest of discrimination against Dalits. One example is the "two-tumbler system" in teashops (the use of separate tumblers for Dalits and the upper caste). See Sivarana (1999), pp. 96–97.

¹²⁶ Ela Bhatt began in 1972 in Gujarat with three hundred women, and by 1988 SEWA had forty thousand women members in seven states. "The goal is to organize self-employed women and make them 'visible,' enabling them to receive higher wages and to have control of their income" (see Behal [1988], pp. 97ff.; see also Tully & Masani [1988], pp. 62ff.).

¹²⁷ A few random examples include: the first woman to set foot on the Everest (see Mitra [1984], p. 140); the establishing in Kerala in 1985 of the second police station run by women dealing with cases related to women (see Prasannan [1985], p. 17), and the enrollment in February 1987 of the first seventy-seven female members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) (see *The Hindū*, February 6, 1987). Today even theological colleges, formerly a male bastion, are accepting an increasing number of women (see *Religion and Society* 31, no. 3 [September 1984]). For women in the field of education, see *Religion and Society* 36, no. 3 (September 1989). See Bhattacharya (1991) for women painters.

¹²⁸ See Mazumdar (1991), pp. 49ff.

The Farmers' Plight

The rapid and often unnecessary transition from traditional to modern technological farming, thereby transforming agriculture into agribusiness, has created an imbalance in the country. Only well-equipped landowners reaped the benefits of the "green revolution." Again, the issue goes beyond technological expertise and economic power; the question is, What kind of civilization do we wish to create? In spite of its degradation due to various other causes, traditional agriculture was integrated into the cycles of the earth and human life—as most religious rituals still show. Toiling the land was a form of making love to the Earth, so that she might yield her fruits. Today the cultivation of the earth is reduced to setting up "factories in the field" for the exploitation of resources and manufacture of (fast) food by agribusiness.

This transition has had a negative impact on the majority of Indian farmers.¹²⁹

It is true that workers employed in agriculture and related sectors, representing just under 70 percent of the population, have their own powerful and well-organized movements. Nonetheless, there are daily press reports on the near-desperate situation of the majority.¹³⁰ The pressure is not only economic and social; it is also psychological. We may single out a movement founded in Maharashtra,¹³¹ and a similar one originating in Uttar Pradesh.¹³² Both have an impact on the entire country.

The Ādivāsīs' Predicament

This is one of the greatest failures of the Indian Republic. In general, the neglect of the ādivāsīs is due neither to racism nor to ill will, but is the result of an uncritical adoption of the European "Enlightenment" ideology, which considers industrial Man as the acme of civilization. Unmalicious neglect is the best the ādivāsīs can expect—and this obviously

¹²⁹ See "The Other Half" in *India Today* (February 15, 1985), p. 7. This sector, grossly neglected during British rule, is now gaining more recognition due to its vital importance: "The growth of systematic awareness in agriculture at the highest levels in India is based on the recognition of the fact that approximately three quarters of total employment, half of national income, over 40 per cent of capital formation and three quarters of export, including manufactured agricultural products are accounted for by this sector" (B. N. Nair [1975], p. 154). We should also keep in mind, however, that 40 percent of the rural population are landless laborers, which means that they do not have a minimum guarantee of any source of income, and 45 percent of those who own land are forced by economic necessity to hold additional jobs or sell their land (Kappen [1977], p. 31). Consequently, only 15 percent of the landowners manage to make any profit.

¹³⁰ The situation of the Dalits is the worst. Seventy-five percent are connected with the land, yet 50 percent are landless laborers while the other 25 percent are very small scale farmers (see *Dalit International Newsletter* [February 1977], p. 3).

¹³¹ Sharad Joshi, leader of the "nonpolitical rural-based movement" Shetkari Sanghatana, defines it as "the most fundamentalist economic movement." He defends "the process of capital accumulation coming from surplus value—from the exploitation of labor. The Shetkari Sanghatana concentrates on this diversion of surplus from agriculture to industry. If surplus production is left with agriculturists, it results in higher wages and greater employment, and this creates purchasing power among the needy. . . . Poverty and economic stagnation are unnatural things. . . . All ills of society, including corruption, are direct products of perverted capital accumulation" (see Bakshi [1987/1], pp. 44ff.). The movement also has a women's front, the Shetkari Sanghatana Mahila Aghadi, which is active in raising women's issues (see Omvedt [1987], pp. 16–17; see also *The Hindū*, January 23, 1985).

¹³² The Bharatiya Kisan (Indian Farmers) Union (BKU) launched a major protest in Meerut, February 1988 (see *The Hindū*, February 3, 14, 16, 17, 1988). In Lucknow, three thousand farmers from Western U.P. were arrested (see *The Hindū*, March 20, 1988).

turns into something less benign when their land shows to be rich in resources, or a dam or other such project is realized.

Throughout the country the original inhabitants of India are suffering exploitation by forest contractors and politicians.¹³³ Though the government has launched several programs for their welfare, most of the time either these programs are conceived in a way that is either alien to their mentality and way of life, or not properly implemented, or both.¹³⁴ In spite of a few private initiatives, the aboriginal population is frustrated.¹³⁵ The displacement occasioned by development projects has immensely affected their way of life.¹³⁶ Destabilization is a result of the measures that tend to uproot them from their natural habitats in order to safeguard "wildlife."¹³⁷ In some regions their sound ethnobotanical knowledge is disregarded while attempts are made to involve them in technological projects that are totally unsuited to the context.¹³⁸

Not surprisingly, since they do not have the means to oppose exploitation, some of the ādivāsīs accept support from extremists.¹³⁹ The present-day ādivāsī awakening is of utmost national importance.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ See *The Hindū*, December 9, 1989. After the result of the local elections, tribals in a remote village who had not voted for the victorious party were violently assaulted by its members. This is a recurrent practice.

¹³⁴ See the terrible examples of "modern" housing in Biswas (1992) built for the pre-Aryan tribals of Vynad, North Kerala. See the entire issue of the *India International Center Quarterly*, titled "Indigenous Vision (Peoples of India Attitudes to the Environment)."

¹³⁵ For example, in recent years the ādivāsīs of five tribes in Gudalur (Nilgiris) have been struggling, with the help of their own Society (Ādivāsī Munnetra Sanga), to recover their ancestral fertile forest land, currently occupied by unscrupulous people, and secure rights for its safeguarding (see Thekaekara [1991/1], pp. 85ff. and [1991/2], pp. 99ff.). Organizations and individuals committed to the cause of the ādivāsīs include P. K. S. Madhavan, from Kerala, who founded AWARE (Action for Welfare and Awakening in Rural Environment) (see G. S. Radhakrishna [1989], pp. 10ff.). See also the Vivekananda Tribal Welfare Center in the Bilgiri Rangana Hills of Karnataka.

¹³⁶ See Devdutt (1987), pp. 42–43, in which striking statistics bear witness to the uprooting of people, particularly tribals, who are forced to abandon their land, homes, and identities to make room for "the temples of modern India." In ten states, fifty lakhs of people have been displaced. Not only has their land been taken from them, but recently, in Chotanagpur (Bihar), where the ādivāsī Christians are numerous, Hindū activists have launched a campaign to "reconvert" them to Hinduism (to which, in fact, they did not previously belong), destroying several of the Christian shrines and building their temples close to the churches (see Bhelari [1990], pp. 18–19). "Development Projects" in Bihar displaced 16 million people, of which 14.4 million (90 percent) were ādivāsīs. Of these only 4.9 million were rehabilitated. An Artillery Practice Project in Gumla will displace 27,800 people, of which, again, 90 percent are ādivāsīs. Public reaction was minimal (see *The Week* [February 5, 1995]).

¹³⁷ See Kolhari (1999), pp. 66–70, for a wildlife policy when the ādivāsīs are integrated.

¹³⁸ See Sekhsaria (1999), pp. 67–71, on the vanishing Onge tribe in the Little Andaman.

¹³⁹ In Andhra Pradesh a militant minority among the Konda Reddis from the hills are helped by the People's War Group (PWG) branch of the Naxalites (see Amarnath K. Menon [1984], pp. 130ff.). Initially, the Naxalite movement was formed with the aim of helping the ādivāsīs in Naxalbari, near the Nepal border, to recover their land (see Vinayak [1989/2], pp. 110–11). For a survey of the Naxalites in West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Orissa, see *Frontline*, August 5–18, 1989, pp. 107ff.; August 19–September 1, 1989, pp. 85 ff.; September 2–15, 1989, 89ff.; and *The Hindū*, January 31, 1995.

¹⁴⁰ See "Subaltern Identity," *Religion and Society* 36, no. 2 (June 1989). The journal's institute had organized a group study on Tribal Awakening in 1965; most of the participants then were from Assam and Nagaland.

The fifty years of struggle for Jharkhand, an *ādivāsī* state that would consist of parts of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa, where different *ādivāsī* communities live, have been partially successful. On September 27, 1994, the Jharkhand Area Autonomous Council (JAAC) for South Bihar was recognized by the Bihar chief minister and the Central Government.¹⁴¹

The Villagers' Reaction

India is the traditional land of over half a million villages. Despite the promised amenities and sometimes genuine improvements, there is still an uninterrupted exodus toward the big cities. This is a direct result of reducing modern culture to a matter of fast profit, and of the imbalance between the machines of first degree (*techné*, craftsmanship, arts, and crafts) and of second degree (technology). If machines allow us to produce merchandise of all kinds a hundred times faster and generate a hundred times more profit than if we follow the more natural pace of traditional cultures, it is virtually impossible to resist the temptation.¹⁴² The resulting conditions are often desperate.¹⁴³ This, in fact, is a worldwide phenomenon. At the beginning of the twentieth century only 13 percent of the world population lived in cities, but by the end the figure has risen to over 50 percent. The growth rate of Indian cities is one of the fastest in the world, and is the result of the industrialization of life. The question, however, is whether this is human life.

Mass media, especially advertising, create a glamorous image of urban-dwellers that not only dazzles the villagers but gives them an increasing sense of inferiority. They find that they themselves are only fit for folklore, and eke out a living by producing folk art to sell to tourists.

Sometimes protest takes the form of staunch resistance against government projects, such as that involving a large area of rich land along the coast of Balasore in Orissa, which has become a virtual battleground.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ The JAAC will comprise eighteen districts. The initial struggle was for a separate state for all the different *ādivāsī* tribes of the region. The present agreement, therefore, cannot satisfy the different groups (see K. Chaudhuri [1994], 32).

¹⁴² In the 1960s and 1970s the cycle rickshaw-vallas of Varanasi preferred to wait for the entire day at the gates of the two Western-style tourist hotels for one or two trips taking foreign tourists to the Ganges rather than sweating all day long carrying "natives." It was more profitable.

¹⁴³ In the census of 1991 the number of farm laborers in the state of Gujarat amounted to 35 lakhs. In June 1990 the government set the minimum daily wages at 15 Rs. On average, however, farm laborers (many of whom are women) are paid 11 Rs and work no more than 60 to 70 days a year (or 120 to 180 on irrigated lands). For over six months they earn between 5 and 10 Rs, and then at harvest time farmers from Punjab and Haryana arrive with their machines and the farm laborers are displaced (see *The Hindū*, March 18, 1993).

¹⁴⁴ The central government seeks to acquire the land in order to set up a national missile testing range for the Defense Ministry, but the inhabitants of the 132 farming villages in the area and a large number of fishermen, comprising a total of around twenty-five thousand people, are opposing the project with great determination. The protesters are not willing to be uprooted and leave their ancestral land to go to some industrial area where the government plans to rehabilitate them in the name of the defense of the country (see F. Ahmed [1985/2], p. 45). The struggle has now intensified. The villagers have barricaded the only road into the area, and no outsider is allowed to enter, including officials. As soon as someone approaches, the women blow their conch shells and a crowd appears to bar their way, with hundreds of villagers laying down on the road to prevent vehicles entering. They have formed a committee, and each village has a suicide squad of children under a commander. A number of leading politicians have taken their cause to heart and appealed to the government to find another site. Mean-

Another undertaking of national concern is the Narmada Valley Project, which has sparked fierce disputes between the government on one side and the inhabitants of the valley (including several ādivāsī communities), environmentalists, and activists on the other. Along the magnificent Narmada River, whose 1,312-kilometer course crosses three different states—Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat—and hosts many holy places on its banks, there are plans to build thirty major dams—including the megadams of Narmada Sagar (M.P.) and Sardar Sarovar (Gujarat)—and three thousand smaller dams. The government claims that this will be immensely beneficial for irrigation and industry, particularly in the arid state of Gujarat. The issues at stake, however, besides the enormous cost and amount of time needed to complete the work, are the horrendous ecological destruction involved and the uprooting of the local population. The most heavily affected will be the ādivāsīs. On September 29, 1989, a huge rally took place at Harsud (M.P.), inspired by Baba Amte, who took a firm stand against large “anti-people” dams. As many as three hundred groups from different parts of the country sponsored the rally, some of them having previously studied the project in depth so as to correctly inform the people. Of the ādivāsīs attending the rally, three thousand had come from as far away as Maharashtra. The twenty-five thousand participants pledged to continue the struggle against the building of the Narmada Sagar dam.¹⁴⁵

On December 16, 1994, the Madhya Pradesh chief minister adopted a new position with regard to the Sardar Sarovar Project,¹⁴⁶ declaring that the state government was examining various technical aspects of the plan and exploring the possibility of reducing the height of the dam, after a Supreme Court order of December 13, 1994, set a height limit and allowed the four signatory states involved in the Narmada project to propose separate solutions to problems that may arise.

In May 1999 the “Save the Narmada” Movement reached a turning point. At the end of July, in a tremendous movement of solidarity with the people affected by the project, a huge rally named “Free the Narmada” was held along the River.¹⁴⁷

This widespread awareness regarding the issue of populations that have no democratic means of defending their rights is worth dwelling on. (The footnote contains excerpts from a

while, the government has established an interim test range at Chandipur-on-Sea, on the same coast, in an area where there are also several villages. Before the launching of Agni, the satellite, on May 1, 1988, the villagers refused to take refuge in shelters, instead offering prayers and sacrificing goats to their deities to prevent Agni from working. Again, for the second time (the first was April 20), Agni was grounded (see Ramdas [1988], pp. 81ff.; T. Ganguly & R.L. Patnaik [1989], pp. 32–33). So far, however, despite the human suffering involved, the government has refused to change the site of the national test range. Eleven other sites have been considered but each presented certain difficulties, and now the government is in a hurry. How will the drama end? (See *The Hindū*, March 4, 1991).

¹⁴⁵ See P. Bagla & S. Menon (1988), pp. 56ff.; Vijapurkar (1988/3), pp. 79ff.; Kesava Menon (1988), pp. 82–83, for a comprehensive study, including excellent photos, of the Narmada River project and its consequences. On the position of the environmentalists and the Harsud rally, see Baruah (1989), pp. 4ff. With the decision of the Central Government to go ahead with the project, the controversy intensifies. Both sides have brought their petitions to the capital: Baba Amte, accompanied by a large number of ādivāsīs, to protest vehemently against the implementation of the project, and the chief minister of Gujarat, with his supporters, to plead in its favor (see Murthy & Choppra [1990], pp. 16–18).

¹⁴⁶ The project was initiated by the World Bank, but support was withdrawn in 1993 when the main problems arose.

¹⁴⁷ See Venkatesan (1999/2), p. 124; Roy (1999), pp. 4–29, an essay that had a great impact; Bavadam (1999/1), pp. 129–34 and (1999/2), pp. 41–43. The fact that the World Bank was involved and later withdrew attracted some attention outside the country.

letter sent by a villager of Jalsindhi [Jhabua district] to the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh.¹⁴⁸)

In Andhra Pradesh a more recent and equally significant dispute is under way regarding the government's plan to set up a nuclear power plant near the Nagarjunsagar lake, in an area which, like that of Baliapal, is fertile and densely populated. The project, which had been abandoned by the previous state government following protests by local people,

¹⁴⁸ Shri Digvijay Singhji,

We, the people of Jalsindhi village . . . are writing this letter to you, the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh.

We are people of the river bank. We live on the banks of the great Narmada. This year, our village Jalsindhi will be the first village in Madhya Pradesh to be submerged by the Sardar Sarovar dam. . . . We will give up our lives but we will not move from our village. When the water comes into our village, when our homes and fields are flooded, we will also drown—this is our firm resolve.

We are writing this letter to let you know why the ādivāsī peasants of Jalsindhi are preparing to drown themselves.

You, and all those who live in cities, think that we who live in the hills are poor and backward, like apes. "Go to the plains of Gujarat. Your condition will improve. You will develop"—this is what you advise us. . . . If it is true that our situation will improve in Gujarat, then why aren't all of us ready to go there?

. . . We have lived in the forest for generations. The forest is our moneylender and banker. In hard times we go to the forest. We build our houses from its wood. From its rushes and splints we weave screens. From the forests we make baskets and cots, ploughs and hoes, and many other useful things. . . . We get various kinds of grasses; and when the grasses become dry in summer, we still get leaves. . . . If there is a famine we survive by eating roots and tubers. When we fall sick, our medicine men bring us back to health by giving us leaves, roots, bark from the forest. We collect and sell gum, tendu leaves, bahera, chironji and mahua. The forest is like our mother; we have grown up in its lap. We know how to live suckling at her breast. We know the name of each and every tree, shrub and herb; we know their uses. If we were made to live in a land without forests, then all this knowledge that we have cherished for generations will be useless and slowly we will forget it all.

. . . The river too is our sustenance. The Narmada has many kinds of fish in her belly. Fish is our stand-by when we have unexpected guests. The river brings us silt from upstream which is deposited on the banks so that we can grow maize and jowar in the winter, as well as many kinds of melons. Our children play on the river's banks, swim and bathe there. Our cattle drink there throughout the year, for the river never dries up. In the belly of the river, we live contented lives. We have lived here for many generations; do we have a right to the mighty river and to our forests or don't we?

. . . After the forests and the river, how can we live in the plains or in the cities? You city people live in separate houses. You ignore each other's joys and sadness. We live with our clan, our relatives, our kin. All of us pool together our labor and build a house in a single day, weed our fields, and do any small task as it comes along. Who will come to lend a hand and make our work lighter in Gujarat? Will the big Patidars come to weed our fields or to construct our houses? . . . In Gujarat, if any sorrow or evil befalls, to whom can we go to tell of our troubles?

. . . You tell us to take land in Gujarat. You tell us to take compensation. For losing our lands, our fields, for the trees along our fields. . . . But how are you going to compensate us for our forest? . . . How will you compensate us for our river—for the joy of living beside her? What is the price for this? . . . Our gods, and the support of our kin—what price do you put on that? Our ādivāsī life—what price do you put on that?

. . . The land in Gujarat is not acceptable to us. Your compensation is not acceptable to us. We were born from the belly of the Narmada, and we are not afraid to die in her lap. . . . In the summer before the monsoons, our village will be filled with water and we will drown.

We will drown but will not move.

Bava Mahalia. (*Frontline*, June 4, 1999)

social workers, and environmentalists, only to be taken up again by the new government, threatens the safety both of the inhabitants and the wildlife due to water pollution. The risks, in fact, are high—the population in the area around the reactor is far more densely populated than it should be, meaning that in the event of an accident it would be impossible to evacuate the people in a short time.¹⁴⁹

Of the myriad instances of so-called development I would like to cite here, one sheds a different light on the issue. In Kodagu (Coorg) the authorities, with the seemingly good intention of halting erosion, promoting production and creating jobs, decided to introduce tea cultivation in the coffee-growing region. This has led to conflict with the local population and several state organizations, who oppose the decision not only from the ecological point of view but also for sociocultural reasons. Tea plantations, they claim, will attract many workers from other regions, resulting not only in crowded living quarters, with all the obvious relative problems, but also in the total submersion of the *kodavas* and their culture.¹⁵⁰

The protest of the villagers is part of the passive resistance described in the previous section.

The Cry of Bonded and Child Laborers

The fact that after half a century of Indian Independence the country tolerates such slavery, in spite of all the supposed good intentions to remedy this national shame, should be a matter of serious concern. A very subtle form of self-justification consists in venting one's anger in outright condemnation of injustice—and then doing nothing about it. To be clear, I am not referring to isolated cases here. Scores of the country's workforce suffer this type of slavery. Their voices have rarely been heard, because if they complain they merely make their situation worse. Yet these bonded laborers (many of whom are Dalits and some are *ādivāsīs*) are gradually beginning to protest. Around one hundred thousand of them organized a rally in Patna (October 25, 1989), and in a huge, silent procession the participants tied strips of cloth over their mouths to symbolize their state of slavery.¹⁵¹ The living conditions of the landless laborers are only slightly better.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ See Narender (1991), p. 9. Expert opinion is divided. Those concerned about the safety of the people and the environment are warning against the consequences of such projects. One such expert, for example, Prof. T. Shivaji Rao of the Center for Environmental Planning and Management Studies, explains in his book *Nuclear Plants: The Silent Killers* that the experience of the Sizewell power station in the United Kingdom demonstrates that in Nagarjunsagar people as far away as Vijayawada will have to be evacuated during the monsoon season in case of an accident. Evacuation must be completed in six hours within the radius of two to five kilometers and in forty-eight hours within a distance exceeding seventy-five kilometers downwind from Nagarjunsagar (see *The Hindū*, December 25, 1994, and January 29, 1995).

¹⁵⁰ The project is to include tea gardens in the 2000 hectares of hilly land, an area characterized by grassland and no trees, due to the impact of the heavy monsoon rain and high wind. The officers of the Forest Department insist that tea plantations will be a boon for the region (see Ramachandra [1988/1], pp. 89ff.).

¹⁵¹ Bihar is known for its high percentage of bonded laborers, of which in the West Champara district alone there are ten thousand. See R.R. Lal (1989), pp. 36ff. Swami Agnivesh, founder of the Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front) and K. R. Education Association of the Jesuits are striving to liberate and rehabilitate them (see *The Hindū*, April 10, 1988). This slavery exists in other states. In 1987, 2.14 lakhs of bonded laborers were identified by the Planning Commission (see *The Hindū*, March 23, 1987). There is a strong branch of the Indian People's Front (IPF) in Bihar also. The IPF, active in sixteen states, brings together people from different groups: extreme left, social activists, environmentalists, etc. It is a growing force, a challenge to traditional political parties, including the Left Wing (see Prasannan [1991], pp. 9–10).

¹⁵² Besides heartless treatment by the landlords and police, there is also a surplus of laborers. See

Domestic workers are another highly exploited and ill-treated group. In big cities it is easier for them to organize themselves and fight for their rights, presenting their demands to the state government and their employers.¹⁵³

Yet of all these millions of exploited laborers, the group that suffers the most is working children, since they are too young and too weak to protest. Increasingly, however, the abominable exploitation and cruel treatment of child laborers are being exposed. There is growing indignation, and some positive (though yet very limited) measures have been taken to alleviate the burden of their inhuman life. According to the National Sample Survey there are 20.5 million child laborers (7.12 percent of the total labor force).¹⁵⁴ Tamil Nadu has the largest number, with over one lakh of children ages between five and twelve employed in its well-known match and fireworks factories at Sivakasi, Sattur, and Vembakottai.¹⁵⁵ In other states, children work in the slate pencil, glass and glass bangles, lock making, brassware, and tile industries. In Badohi-Mirzapur (near Varanasi) around seventy-five thousand children are employed in the handwoven carpet industry.¹⁵⁶ All these children are from extremely poor families, which count on their wages, however meager. The National Child Labor Project of 1988 seemed to offer a ray of hope in Sivakasi and the surrounding area,¹⁵⁷ but today free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen, as recommended by the Constitution (Article 45 of the Directive Principle of State Policy), still remains a dream.¹⁵⁸ In fact, by 1993 the situation was even worse. We must dig deeper to find the true causes.¹⁵⁹

Ela Bhatt's efforts, with her SEWA workers, to increase employment opportunities for the landless laborers of Bihar (see Tully & Masani [1988], pp. 62–63).

¹⁵³ The Griha Karmikara Sangha (Domestic Workers' Union) was founded in Bangalore in 1985. Thanks to the union, members have achieved recognition as a workforce and gained better living and working conditions.

¹⁵⁴ See Chandrasekhar (1991), p. 92.

¹⁵⁵ See Balasubramaniam (1991). A documentary film on Sivakasi child labor, titled *Kutti Japanin kuzhandaigal* [Children of Mini Japan], was screened at the international film festival in Chennai. "Chalam Bannurkar's camera follows the daily routine of the children—from their homes to dingy workplaces, which are full of sulphur fumes. Jolted out of bed at five in the morning, the children are herded into factory buses and ferried to hundreds of small and medium match and fireworks units in and around Sivakasi. Many pairs of tiny hands are soon at work chopping wood, waxing sticks, dipping them in burning phosphorous, pasting boxes, packing sticks into boxes. By 7 p.m. the children are herded back to their villages with Rs 3 or Rs 5 thrust into their palms" (Chandramouli [1991], p. 61. See also "Holding Out Hope," *Frontline*, January 27, 1995).

¹⁵⁶ See *The Hindü*, October 15, 1989. See also Kaul (1989), pp. 26ff. See Sunil (1991), pp. 30–31, on the plight of the children in general in the country. In Agra 50 percent of the workforce of the glass industry are children. See Tully & Masani (1988), pp. 65ff.

¹⁵⁷ The implementation of the National Child Labor Project.

¹⁵⁸ The political scientist M. Weiner (1991) shows how school attendance and child labor are linked. The author investigated the motives behind the government's apathy concerning the promotion of children's education and the banning of child labor. The reasons are not economic, but sociological. On a national level, in fact, other countries with a low average income, such as China, Tanzania, and Kerala, have a high rate of primary school attendance (see Gouridasan [1991], pp. 95ff.). The prevailing attitude among a large part of the middle class is that children's education would upset the existing social configuration. See by the same professor, "An Open Letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalita," which offers suggestions on "how to solve child labor in Sivakasi" (*Frontline*, March 12, 1993, pp. 92–93). See also "Getting Children into School," *Frontline*, April 27, 1991, part 1, pp. 52–60, and May 11, 1991, part 2, pp. 87–91. See also *Frontline*, January 24, 1997, pp. 81–82.

¹⁵⁹ See the perceptive analyses of V. Das (1989).

A remark that people who regret the situation often make is that if those children did not work, their families would fare even worse. Social workers constantly hear the same thing. Parents who earn little are forced to supplement their own income by sending their children to work. At the same time, however, this also shows how even intellectuals and social activists have accepted the untouchability of the present techno-scientific-economic system, to the extent that any other alternative is virtually inconceivable.

When will the children of the world be free to live as children?

The Artists' Revolution

It is a trait of Homo sapiens and an empirical fact of history that artists are more able to penetrate the individual and collective recesses of human reality than so-called pure intellectuals.

The artistic production of India reflects modern-day uneasiness.¹⁶⁰ Theatre, poetry, painting, sculpture, and especially literature and cinema all express this sentiment. In general, music and architecture have perhaps limited themselves to copying the old or imitating the West, although Western influence is also seen in other art forms.¹⁶¹

A review of the vernacular literature shows that there is a strong tendency in novels, stories, drama, and poetry to bring into the open those fundamental issues that have always existed and are felt even more acutely today.¹⁶²

While, generally, a large part of cinema remains mediocre and unrealistic, aiming at popular success rather than quality, there are outstanding filmmakers in various regions, especially in Kerala,¹⁶³ Assam,¹⁶⁴ West Bengal,¹⁶⁵ and Karnataka.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ See Chopra (1999), pp. 78–79: "Sharing the Agony."

¹⁶¹ See the articles in *Daedalus* (1989) dedicated to Indian painting, fiction, poetry, and theatre. See also the moving selection of poems from modern marathi Dalit literature in Dangle (1992).

¹⁶² Mallika Sarabhai, the well-known classical dancer, is an excellent example. Her performance as Draupadi in the Peter Brook's *Mahābhārata* made a strong case against the exploitation of women by society. See theatre director Habib Tanvir, who worked mainly with folk artists from his native state of Chatishgarh, in their own dialect. Tanvir was inspired by Brecht, and he himself sought a new idiom. See P. Ramaswamy (1990). See Desai (1989) for a short survey of fiction literature.

¹⁶³ Adoor Gopalakrishnan and G. Aravindan. See Aravindakshan (1984), pp. 46–47; Mohamed (1987), pp. 44–45; Kumar (1989), pp. 96ff.

¹⁶⁴ The young Jahnū Barua, speaking about his *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai* [Yellow Birds Eating Away the Crop], which won the national film award (1988), says that it is an appeal to change a system "entrenched in a sadistic approach and heavily tilted toward the rich and influential" (see Sastry [1988]).

¹⁶⁵ Among the young generation, Buddhadev Dasgupta is firmly committed to maintaining a realistic approach to life (see Geetha [1989], pp. 118ff.). To the zealous Marxist Upalendu Chakravarti, films are "the most effective instruments to depict the poignant realities of the hypocritical society we live in today" (see Shankar [1989]). As for the established filmmakers, Mrinal Sen, whose films deal heavily with the issue of poverty, now believes that "it is important to concentrate on the individual and his problems" (see *The Hindū*, October 27, 1989). Tapan Sinha also expresses a social concern: "I based this story [his film *Ek Doctor Ki Maus*] on the suicide of a young scientist from Delhi" (see Kanaala [1991], pp. 132–33). Of his film *Shakha Proshakha* [Roots and Branches], Satyajit Ray says, "You cannot deny the fact that at every stage in life, every day, in everything you do, you hear of corruption at every level of society. And I thought that this was an inevitable theme to be treated in at least one of my films" (see *The Hindū*, January 13, 1991).

¹⁶⁶ G. V. Iyer, known for the high quality of his classical films on Adishankaracarya, Madhvacharya, and Ramanuja, has a wider range of interests. In 1988, while preparing the film *Wall Poster* he asked, "What is a 'Wall Poster'? It is a mask of human behavior. It is our life. We are nothing but wall posters." See his interview with K. Venkatesh in *The Hindū*, June 17, 1988.

Some of these directors are already well known,¹⁶⁷ and others belong to a younger generation.¹⁶⁸ They are making films of a high caliber, realistic, with a profound social insight and concern.¹⁶⁹ As for the *doordarshan* serials, one of the most realistic and challenging was *Tamas*, on the tragedy of Partition. The serial aroused a good deal of controversy, but according to the director, "*Tamas* is much, much more than a mere film. It is an act of faith."¹⁷⁰

A double commentary may be appropriate here. On the one hand, novels and cinema are powerful means of raising the level of people's consciousness. Artists are naturally sensitive to the real-life situation of people and the trends of the times. On the other hand, the Western style of imported democracy carries with it an implicit nominalism that tends to water down the revolutionary character of films and literature. By nominalism I mean the belief that words, including images and pictures, are merely external labels for things. From this perspective, one may say anything as long as nothing is changed. Literature and cinema arouse pity, admiration, or vexation. Their impact is great, but it is so dispersed that it is virtually impossible to attempt a general prognosis.

I could cite many more examples of sociocultural awareness, of quiet but effective steps taken at the local level and without any publicity. Many articles in the daily newspapers, weekly journals, and especially on the "Letters to the Editor" pages reveal the widespread indignation and frustration, and some offer important suggestions.

The Dalits' Rebellion

There are periodic reports from all over the country of massacres of Dalits by high-caste people. Up to now, government officials and local police have been ineffective in helping Dalits assert their rights and achieve their implementation. When these massacres take place, the nation is usually alarmed by the press reports and several politicians go to the site and attempt to provide some temporary relief, but nothing substantial is achieved. Until the Dalits gain confidence and organize themselves so that they can protest against the terrible discrimination to which they are subjected, nothing will happen.¹⁷¹ From time to time, we do hear of certain positive initiatives on their part.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Like Shyam Benegal, who has a deep perception of human psychology, particularly of women, and socioeconomic situations, as well as a latent concern for the rural poor (see Bhaskaran [1991]).

¹⁶⁸ See Krishnakumar & Ganguly (1985), pp. 16ff., for a brief survey.

¹⁶⁹ We may cite Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* on the street children of the metropolis. See Rajendran (1988).

¹⁷⁰ The film is based on Bhishan Sahni's novel *Tamas*. See Nihalani's (the filmmaker) personal account of *Tamas* (1988), pp. 30–31, in which he says, "My aim is to emphasize the *human* tragedy caused by politicians' manipulations of the religious sentiments of various communities. *Tamas* highlights the trauma befalling the common man, what he has to suffer for no fault of his own."

¹⁷¹ See Rajagopalachari's statement: "A bold plan is what the Harijan community needs, a plan of equality and virile competition," not "an extension of reservation" (see R. Gandhi [1984], p. 354). See also the recent study on the Dalit movement, especially in Karnataka, in Nagaraj (1993); Bidwai (1999/2), pp. 90–91: "The Terrible Reality of the 160 Millions."

¹⁷² After one such massacre in Andhra Pradesh, triggered by a trivial dispute between a high-caste boy and a harijan girl, the whole community (around one thousand persons) left the small town of Karamchedu for Chirala. Forming a victims' relief committee they managed to purchase land in Chirala, where they started a colony named Vijayanagar, as an expression of their victory in settling the matter without any government assistance. They refused ex-gratia payments until the culprits were arrested (see M. V. Rao [1985], pp. 101–2).

Predictably, the Dalits have the highest unemployment rate in the country.¹⁷³ The government job reservation policy has certainly helped some of them, but it does not get to the root of the evil, nor does it restore the human dignity that the Dalits have been denied for centuries. In some regions, upper-caste landlords have used extreme violence against them, going as far as organizing private armies to attack Dalits if they upset the status quo.¹⁷⁴ Even a center of higher studies for Dalit students was attacked.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness among the people and some gestures of genuine solidarity.¹⁷⁶

Recently, a private initiative originating in Tamil Nadu began helping educated Dalits to acquire self-confidence, self-awareness, and social awareness through counseling, guidance, training programs, and camps designed to cater to their specific needs.¹⁷⁷

While recognizing the positive aspects of this type of initiative, I cannot help pointing out that betterment on the micro-level also has the negative effect of prolonging the agony of the system on the macro-level.

If even Freudian psychoanalysis has been identified as a way of reincorporating the lost sheep into the mainstream of "bourgeois" society, how much more sensitive should we be to the danger of absorbing Dalits and aboriginals into the mainstream of a civilization that is becoming increasingly rational and automatized while destroying other cultures and ways of life?

The desperate hunt for jobs is symptomatic. A technologically structured society will need fewer and fewer workers to run the economy and provide for the "needs" of the whole country as jobs become automated. Is it our intention to increase unemployment? Does not the current plan make competition tougher and crueler? If the dominant view of Man is that of an animal anthropology, then the law of the jungle will prevail.

Society needs to be totally restructured, which in turn calls for a change in kosmology. We cannot overcome the salary/job-oriented society unless our understanding of the very nature of this human activity also changes. It is important to distinguish between *work*, a creative human activity geared to personal fulfillment, and communal cooperation in sustaining the universe (the *loka-samgraha* of the Gītā), and *labor*, the offering of one's capacities to a generally anonymous concern (that is, in the case of state administration, a bureaucracy with millions of employees) in exchange for a salary that basically only allows laborers to eke out a living.

The plight of the Dalits, however, has existed for centuries.¹⁷⁸ The Indra of the *Rg-veda* is the enemy of the *dāsyus* and protector of the *āryans*.¹⁷⁹ Again, this paradoxically justifies

¹⁷³ According to a recent survey there were 34.4 million job seekers by the end of September 1990, an increase of 6.1 percent in a year (see A. Mukherjee [1991], p. 30).

¹⁷⁴ See Chaudhuri (1999), pp. 42–43, on the Ranvir Sena (army) in central Bihar.

¹⁷⁵ See Rajalakshmi (1999/1), p. 118.

¹⁷⁶ In Kozhikode, Arundhati Roy offered the royalties of the Malayalam translation of her best-selling novel (*The God of Small Things*) to the Dalit Sahitya Academy (see Nair [1999], pp. 81–83).

¹⁷⁷ This is the first and most important phase of the Facilitation Center in Chennai. In the second phase, while taking advantage of the benefits provided by the government, the center will strive to take concrete steps in securing loans from banks; hold coaching classes geared to entering government services, banking, etc., throughout the country; provide legal aid for investigating cases of discrimination and injustice; and remain in contact with similar organizations in India and abroad.

¹⁷⁸ This is the name they prefer, which has begun to replace other names given mainly by outsiders, such as *untouchables*, *scheduled castes*, *depressed classes*, *harijan*, *caṇḍāla*, *acuta*, *asura*, *dāsa*, *dāśya*, *dāśya-kula*, etc.

¹⁷⁹ See *RV* I.7.9 (He [Indra] killed the *dāsyus* and defended the *āryan varṇa*); *RV* I.33.4; *RV* II.20.8; *RV* VII.83.1. We will not embark here on a historical discussion as to whether or not the Dravidians

our title. One of the many horrible acts committed by Indra, in fact, was to kill the “noseless *dāsyus*.”¹⁸⁰

Until Independence, the treatment of the Dalits was “officially” and “religiously” justified¹⁸¹ and put into practice.¹⁸² This sentiment is so ingrained in the Indian soul that the Mahātmā himself, during the long and heated discussions about Dalits abandoning the Hindū fold, made disparaging remarks about them.¹⁸³ He sincerely believed that the phenomenon of the untouchables was at an end and that their acceptance by Hindūs would purify Hinduism.¹⁸⁴ One can still read in the report by the first Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes that their distinguishing criteria are:

1. Tribal origin.
2. Primitive way of life and habitation in remote and less easily accessible areas.
3. General backwardness in all respects.¹⁸⁵

At the 1986 conference on “Dalit Theology,”¹⁸⁶ it was said that theology needs to be released from its Latin and Sanskritic captivity.¹⁸⁷

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar once remembered the well-known fact “that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions.”¹⁸⁸ After fifty years of struggle the Dalits have become tired of calls for mere social action to better their conditions. Ambed-

were the autochthonous people of the subcontinent. The fact is that contemporary Dalits feel they are the successors of the defeated and subjugated peoples. They are beginning to be aware that their history dates back thirty-five hundred years.

¹⁸⁰ See *RV* V.38.10.

¹⁸¹ The Mānavadharmasāstra (probably seventh century AD), in fact, says, “Candalas and Caupacas should dwell outside the village, be without utensils, (for) their property is dogs and asses, be clothed with the garments of the dead, with (only) iron ornaments” (*Manu* X.38).

¹⁸² In 1930 the kallar caste in Ramanathapuram issued eight prohibitions: (1) the adi-dravidas shall not wear ornaments of gold or silver; (2/3/8) the males should not wear their clothes below their knees or above the hips, nor coats, shirts or banians, nor sandals, nor carry umbrellas; (5) only earthen vessels shall be used; (6/7) women shall not cover their upper body nor use flowers or saffron paste (see K. Wilson [1993], p. 82).

¹⁸³ “Would you preach the Gospel to a cow?” Gandhi once said in an interview. “Well, some of the untouchables are worse than cows in understanding. I mean they can no more distinguish between the relative merits of Islām and Hinduism and Christianity than a cow” (M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India* [Allahabad, 1941], p. 98 [apud Webster (1992), p. 114 with further details]).

¹⁸⁴ See Webster (1992), pp. 107–28, for this fascinating and dramatic story.

¹⁸⁵ And this was printed after receiving comments from the states (since his draft was even more colonialistically ethnocentric) (see Massey [1991], p. 66).

¹⁸⁶ Published in a book of the same title, Prabhakar (1988).

¹⁸⁷ See Ayrookuzhiel (1988/1), pp. 83–103. Along the same line, the CISRS published an issue of *Religion in Society* on “Emerging Dalit Consciousness and Ideological Perceptions,” 35, no. 2 (June 1988). See also Ayrookuzhiel (1990). The study contains pertinent analyses, e.g., by Chirakkarode (1990), pp. 52ff. After the centenary of Dr. Ambedkar’s birth we should remember his thoughts, struggles, and achievements, and that he advocated a separate electorate for the scheduled castes. See P. Radhakrishnan (1991); Ram (1991), pp. 114ff.

¹⁸⁸ *Annihilation of Caste*, 69, quoted by Ayrookuzhiel (1990), p. 101. He refers to the presidential address of a conference in Lahore that was cancelled because the organizers found Ambedkar’s views objectionable. See *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi and Caste in India—Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*, Jullundur (1968). See Webster (1992), pp. 110ff., for details.

kar's old idea that the oppressed must struggle for their own nationality, *mardhita desiyata*, has begun to gain momentum. The Dalits have rejected Hindū culture, which they feel is the cause of their predicament. While some have become Christians and others Muslims or neo-Buddhists, the majority are striving to recover their suffocated culture and religion. As far back as in 1935 Dr. Ambedkar announced in Yeola (Mumbai Presidency) that he would not die a Hindū, and today this sentiment has spread considerably.

In short, the Dalit people, in spite of their many internal differences and even disputes, are beginning to realize that social uplift is not enough; they must take their destiny into their own hands. They hope to build a political movement that will enable them to organize their own society.¹⁸⁹ Many of these groups advocate a "total revolution," but although they have retained a Marxist ideology, they do not seem to have a clear program, except for their legitimate insistence on full human dignity and political freedom. What is being questioned here, ultimately, is the myth of the nation-state.

The Students' Unrest

The role played by students in India is a triple sign of vitality, intellectual poverty, and political instability.

It is obvious that the nonworking population, not having to earn a living, has time to become increasingly aware of the country's unresolved problems. Students, in fact, form the natural group for any kind of agitation. The case of Assam is paradigmatic, but not unique.

It has been said that students are the unruly mass exploited by political parties; this is not always the case, however, because it is often they themselves who take the lead—even apart from the problems of higher education in India, and in the world at large.

It is not my intention here to analyze the causes of student unrest or their leading role in such disturbed regions as Punjab, Kashmir, and Assam, as well as several others. What I wish to emphasize is the total inadequacy of the present system of education, as seen both in the poor academic level achieved and in its failure to provide the proper motivations.

Once again, we must look at the deeper causes of such behavior.

The moment universities abdicated their traditional role of the pursuit and cultivation of genuine knowledge, the moment they ceased to be a guild of teachers and students passionately committed to discovering and realizing truth, it became more than legitimate for students to throw themselves into the burning and unresolved issues of the country.

Those who are familiar with traditional university life since the European Middle Ages over nine hundred years ago tell us of small groups of intellectually gifted people thinking, discussing, searching, challenging, projecting, and even dreaming, who gathered together "to save the world and themselves" while striving to understand the Mystery of Life. Yet once human life came under the grip of economic totalitarianism, after the virtual dismantling of the subsistence economies, most universities of the modern world became institutions geared to providing skills and passing on information to the younger generations in order to equip them for earning their livelihood. This techno-scientific know-how, however, is not saving knowledge and, except for the few inventors who create the system, does not arouse any passion or enthusiasm. Universities have become technical trade high schools that raise expectations of a "higher standard of living" for those who have spent long years in such training. The consequences are well known. At least political and social action is an outlet

¹⁸⁹ See the Bahujan Party mentioned earlier.

for the vitality of young people whose idealism is not satisfied by the teachings of today's university curricula. It is no coincidence that the "brain drain" of the "best" students to the West continues by the thousands.

The Intellectuals' Critique

There is neither a lack of numbers nor of quality among Indian intellectuals, not only in universities and other centers of higher learning but also in scores of other private institutions. India does not lack scientists, sociologists, historians, and philosophers. There is an abundance of books and studies, which cannot be analyzed here. Let it suffice to say that many modern Indian intellectuals are critical of India, keen in their diagnoses and clear in their studies.¹⁹⁰ There is also an acute preoccupation with the image that India projects abroad, and many of the studies written in English are oriented to foreign readers.

I shall limit myself here to describing three main gaps.

The first one has recently been officially taken up by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research. This is the gap between all those thinkers whose medium of expression is mainly English and the traditional pundits, who still exist, although in decreasing numbers, throughout the country. These latter do not give different answers to the problems of the so-called Indian *intelligentsia*; they simply ask different questions. These are the questions of traditional India, which are often lacking in the dominating historical consciousness of modern official India. Having their own intellectual and spiritual life the *pundita* are immersed in their old traditions and acknowledge modernity simply as a given fact, accepting it without a great deal of criticism. To them modernity means technical gadgets and a somewhat superficial attitude to life.

The second gap is the hiatus between the *intelligentsia*, the politicians, and the people. This hiatus is perhaps best bridged by literature, cinema, and the arts, as I have already mentioned. Philosophers and intellectuals are generally respected, and they feel free to express their opinions and write about them. Except in a few cases, however, these have little influence on the political life of the country. When philosophers like S. Radhakrishna, Humayun Kabir, and others held important political positions they obviously raised the standard of political style, but they hardly changed the overall state of affairs. In general, it was not expected of them. In spite of the efforts of Marxist thinkers, there is still a great dichotomy between matters of the spirit and real-life, day-to-day political and economic problems.

There is another, more formidable gap, however, that is seldom noticed by intellectuals in general and philosophers in particular—with a few, mainly modern-day exceptions. For lack of a better word, I call this the *cultural gap*. We know that "Indian philosophy" is not only *Vedānta*, as that philosophy includes also social philosophy and that metaphysics has many names; but the almost exclusive feature of Indian thinking (pundits included) is theoretical

¹⁹⁰ Professor Amartya Sen summarized his appraisal of government policies since the Independence thus: "Before the 1991 reforms on economic liberalization I had consistently taken the view that there were two major deficiencies in the Indian economy: a massive underactivity in the fields of education, land reform, health care and social security in general and a vast overactivity of the government in running a license raj. . . . My main criticism of the policies that followed in 1991 concerns errors of omission rather than commission, namely that they addressed only the second issue. . . . There was a need for a big initiative from the government of expanding the social basis of economic development in terms of education, health care, land reform, social security and so on. One government after another has neglected these vital social opportunities—there was a need for a radical change in that. Unfortunately, that need still remains unfulfilled." See A. Sen (1991/1), p. 51; see also Bagchi (1999).

philosophy. Virtually the only exception is Marxist thinking, which has gone to the other extreme of being almost exclusively practical and pragmatic.

Let me offer a very blatant example. One third of the Indian population (being generous with the second third, which lies somewhat within the field of influence of the remaining third) is simply non-existent as the subject-matter of Indian reflection. It is left to sociologists and anthropologists as a field of study. I refer, of course, to the Dalits in general. Reading the works of philosophers in the subcontinent throughout the ages, not only Hindū writers but Buddhists, Jainas, Parsis, Christians, Muslims, and others, one would not imagine that there exists an entire marginalized population that also thinks. Classical Western philosophy is not much better off, and one marvels at the opinions of great minds and even saints on slavery, for instance. Although women have been also neglected, they were nevertheless necessary for the survival of the species, like the throngs of the lower castes for the well-being of the elites. Intellectual reflection on Man and even on reality has been exclusively that which the self-appointed cultural Man (generally the upper-caste male) applies to himself. Cross-cultural awareness, in the deepest sense of the word, has been conspicuously nonexistent, and, what is more revealing, unconsciously absent. The result is a monocultural vision of Man and reality, as if *Homo sapiens* were not also a fully sentient animal, that is, a living soul (animal) capable of tasting, feeling, knowing, enjoying and sensibly (that is, consciously) living—which is, in fact, what the word *sapientia* stands for. This is the cultural gap. No wonder that the first outbursts against this state of affairs have lacked maturity and insight.¹⁹¹ In short, most intellectuals use the *logos*, and use it profoundly, but they have practically ignored the *mythos*.

All in all, the rules of the game for philosophical activity have been mainly Western, based on the separation of metaphysics and epistemology, of “philosophy” and “theology,” of philosophy and religion, and suchlike.¹⁹²

Religious Counteractions

India cannot be understood without taking religion into account. In the midst of all sorts of protest and activism, revealing different sociological, cultural, or political tendencies, there is a more or less conscious longing for the spiritual dimension that is inherent to all human beings. This longing is both fascinating and disquieting. Fascinating, because besides some indication of renewal in traditional *dharma* (in its broader meaning), there is also a great variety of new shoots; disquieting because the overall chaotic situation, marked by the increasing implementation of technology, threatens to wash away a great many of the old trees and trigger extremist reactions. Let us begin this analysis by looking at the popular forms of religiosity that, despite being extensively practiced by the people, tend to be overlooked.¹⁹³

An increasing number of religious movements are abandoning a strictly “religious” shell and entering the social and political spheres.

People today are seeking an anchor that can prevent them from being carried away by the currents of the modern age. Here are a few examples.

¹⁹¹ Only recently we have begun to see the appearance of a Dalit worldview, a philosophy (or theology) of liberation and a more mature mind-set of Marxist influence. It is interesting to note that “The CPI (M) [Communist Party India (Marxist)] launches a publishing venture, with a view to enlarging the domain of socialist theory and restoring some of the traditional concern of Left-wing politics to their earlier centrality” (see Muralidharan [1999/2], pp. 80–81).

¹⁹² See Panikkar (1997/XXXIX).

¹⁹³ See “Deities of the people” (Seminar, Tamil Nadu), which claims that over 60 percent of popular worship derives from folk culture (see Vishwanathan [1999/2], pp. 95–96).

In Rajasthan, a new festival has been added to the many that already exist in Khejarli village (near Jodhpur), which is also a pilgrimage center with special relevance today.¹⁹⁴

Among the swamis and religious people of all *dharma*s, a few are acutely aware of the utter neglect of the destitutes and the disintegrating effects of the current trends in society. These few attempt to deal with the situation by helping people attain personal fulfillment, with their roots planted in the best of the Indic traditions while, at the same time, remaining citizens of our time.¹⁹⁵

A number of religious leaders feel an urgent need to revive spiritual values and help to promote the proper training of the youth through a healthy education modeled on the ancient *gurukula*, but with a wider vision. These include the well-known institutions of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Sri Sarya Sai Baba, Narayana Guru, and some lesser known education centers run by Hindūs, Muslims, Christians, and others.¹⁹⁶

Educational efforts rooted in the *dharma* are mainly geared to youth and future-oriented. Even outside the monastic orders, for example, there are people who, for spiritual reasons, are highly dedicated to a cause. A fairly recent development among Hindūs, they are increasingly engaged in offering social or medical services for the poor and the oppressed as a dimension of the *dharma*.¹⁹⁷

In 1972 the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Project began a special type of society for activists: a non-sannyāsi order of lifelong dedicated workers.¹⁹⁸

The educational efforts of Christian institutions deserve special mention. This is so much the case that many people almost identify Christianity with schools and other social institutions—sometimes with the unfounded suspicion that their purpose is simply to increase proselytism.¹⁹⁹

Among some social reformers and activists, who tend to avoid any form of religion and spirituality as “obscurantism” and are equally dissatisfied with Marxism and radical humanism, a new category is emerging. In their struggle for social justice and human liberation they are

¹⁹⁴ People gather here around the temple dedicated to Swami Jameshvar, who founded the Bishnoi community five hundred years ago, to pay homage to his memory and that of the 363 Bishnoi martyrs. The members of the community are committed to protecting the trees and the animals, both domestic and wild, even at the cost of their own lives (see Vijapurkar [1985], pp. 80–82).

¹⁹⁵ One example is Swami Raghavendra, in Karnataka: an Ayurveda doctor and pharmacologist, yoga teacher, beggar, writer, musician, and even wrestler. Since his Sevashram began as a modest village orphanage in 1943 it has steadily developed, promoting the welfare of the poor local villagers (see Murthy [1984], pp. 16ff.).

¹⁹⁶ Certain institutions, although known only in their own regions, quietly but effectively contribute to providing a sound education. One such institution is the Sarada Vidyalaya in Salem (Tamil Nadu), founded in 1956 (see *The Hindū*, May 1, 1987).

¹⁹⁷ The Śankaracarya of Kancipuram sponsored a number of such endeavors. For example, the Kumbakonam Hindū Mission Hospital has been involved in leprosy relief work since 1981 and today runs forty-three subcenters (see *The Hindū*, January 30, 1987). The Śankaracarya recently launched a national movement named Jana Kalyan. “It will not be limited to religion, meaning it is not just for one religion. It will have to embrace the whole of the nation and involve all religions” (see Jayanth [1987], pp. 98ff.; *The Hindū*, February 29, 1988; March 6, 1988).

¹⁹⁸ “Whether married or single, the worker will combine dedicated service of the people (without) with spiritual life (within), thus breaking the long-standing barrier between life and religion, between work and worship, in the spirit of the yoga of the *jñāna-karma-bhakti* synthesis of the *Gītā*” (Ranganathananda [1972], pp. 12ff.).

¹⁹⁹ Christian literature on the subject is vast; see, for example, Amalorpavadan (1973), *Evangelizzazione e cultura* (1976), Karokaran (1978), and Motte & Lang (1981).

searching for a form of spirituality that is independent from any organizational structure, reaching right down to the roots of Man's theandric reality, which can strengthen both themselves and those they are trying to help.²⁰⁰

Of many other organizations we could mention, the most important is the neo-Buddhist movement.²⁰¹

B. R. Ambedkar's plea at the end of his life is especially revealing:

My final word of advice to you is Educate, Agitate and Organize. Have faith in yourself. With justice on your side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power, it is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality.²⁰²

Before closing this brief analysis let us focus on the three main religious groups of India: Hindūs, ādivāsīs, and Muslims.

As I have said, Hinduism is actually a collection of religious traditions, and the name was coined merely for the purpose of distinguishing them from other, more compact or homogeneous forms of religiousness. The same applies to the "tribals," or ādivāsīs. Because of the polymorphic character of Hinduism, there is a neo-Hindū tendency to liken the tribal religions to Hinduism, causing a fair amount of tensions and problems.

Recent political developments, which have culminated in the two "democratic" victories of the more militant Hindū parties, have brought to the fore one aspect of the country's complex political situation. It is important to remember that the renascent Hindutva movement has ancient origins. The name was coined in 1923 in a pamphlet by V. D. Savarkar, the belligerent, anti-Muslim president of the Hindū Mahasabha (great assembly of the Hindūs) as a motto for Hindū nationalism. The pamphlet focused on the revival of the Hindū heritage and defended the creation of a new religio-political entity, a "Hindudom." It had lasting influence on the RSS (Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sang, the national assembly of volunteers, founded in 1925), a well-organized religious society emphasizing selfless service to the country under a strict discipline.²⁰³

Also an Indian religion is Islām, which has been rooted in Indian soil since the end of the tenth century and has dominated the country for several centuries.²⁰⁴ The Muslim population

²⁰⁰ "Pipal Tree is a movement which creatively explores the relationship between spirituality and social action. It primarily aims to knit together people who fight against social, economic and political exploitation on the basis of shared spiritual values." Among its main objectives Pipal Tree focuses on "whatever is liberative within every religion in India" and on "fostering a spirituality of social action" (in *Pipal Tree, A Project Proposal* [Bangalore], for private circulation; see also "A Pipal Tree Workshop," January 15–17, 1999, Bangalore).

²⁰¹ "Since 1956 an estimated three and a half million of the former Untouchable Castes in India have become Buddhists." Babasaheb Ambedkar has inspired the whole movement. The neo-Buddhists had such veneration for him that they called him a "bodhisatva" (see Fiske [1969], pp. 123, 130).

²⁰² Speech at the All India Department Classes Conference, Nagpur, July 18, 1954.

²⁰³ During the last few decades, the RSS has inspired the right-wing political party Jan Sang, later renamed BJP (Indian People's Party, 1951; 1979) and strengthened the "Hinduness" of the cultural association Vishva Hindū Parishad (All Hindū Council, 1964). Associations based on the same ideology succeeded in defeating the Congress Party, which, except for a short period, had controlled the destiny of the country since Independence.

²⁰⁴ See R. C. Mazumdar (1940), pp. 61–66.

is often called a minority, but one can hardly call minority a throng of over 110 million people. The formal statistics, according to which the country has 82 percent Hindūs and 11 percent Muslims, is not an accurate reflection of the real situation. Hinduism is polymorphous, while Islām is more compact. After Partition, Muslims kept a relatively low profile.²⁰⁵ They were disoriented, feeling that they had to prove to themselves and to others that they were as good Indians as any other citizens of the Republic. To be sure, flares of communalism do occasionally ravage the country. Partition was a historical trauma and such wounds take long to heal.²⁰⁶ It would be wrong to emphasize only the hostility and the threats on both sides. There are also genuine movements for peace.²⁰⁷

A community of such proportions, which has existed for centuries in the country, cannot be treated as a minority without hurting the legitimate feelings of the people. To begin with, Indic Islām has features of its own, not only psychological and cultural, but also theological. Not surprisingly, there is Muslim participation both in all present-day movements of protest in India and in Islamic foment, as the more recent events at Ayodhya have shown.²⁰⁸

Muslim philosophers, religious leaders, and sociologists have attempted to analyze the impact of so-called modernity on their own people, on the country at large, and to suggest ways of dealing with it.²⁰⁹ The common conclusion is that Muslims cannot remain isolated in a ghetto to preserve the purity of their culture and spirituality; they must be open to change, to be contemporary while preserving the core of the essential values and characteristics of their tradition. The true challenge is how to achieve this in such an atmosphere of suspicion.

Many people today who are not associated with any movement or institution, who follow a profession and struggle to keep themselves and their families abreast of the rapidly changing situation, as they feel their identity threatened are increasingly looking for spiritual guides wherever they can find them. When the guides of our time are genuinely "spiritual," their influence can be immense.²¹⁰

The mutual fecundation of religions is also visible. For the past thirty years traditional Hindū ashrams dedicated to purely individual realization have been turning to social service. At the same time Christians, who in the past would have been dedicated to education and social uplift, have begun contemplative ashrams.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ See A. S. Ahmed (1990) for an overall assessment with special reference to South Asia.

²⁰⁶ See Seervai (1990) for a demythologizing account of the events.

²⁰⁷ See the Peace Conference in Karachi (February 1999), with five hundred delegates from different ethnic and social groups, including participants from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (see Bidwai [1999/1], pp. 109–10).

²⁰⁸ At the supposed birthplace of Lord Rama—Rama Janmabhumi—there is said to have stood a temple that, during the reign of Babar (who established the Mughal dynasty in India in 1526) had been supplanted by a mosque known as Babri Masjid. A controversy between Hindūs and Muslims took on increasing political overtones, and the masjid was demolished by Hindū fundamentalists in December 6, 1992. The furor caused by the destruction represents a turning point in modern Indian history. See S. Gopal (1991), a serious study that appeared before the destruction of the masjid. See a brief account in Larson (1995), pp. 266–77.

²⁰⁹ See Khan (1988) for an in-depth sociological analysis. Though the survey has been conducted in a big city among people of different social and occupational backgrounds, it gives an insight into the general attitude of Muslims in our time. See Ravindra (1978) for a more philosophical analysis, and Ramswarup (1986; 1990/1/2/3) for a more extremist and negative view.

²¹⁰ J. Krishnamurti could be cited here.

²¹¹ See Griffiths (1985), pp. 46ff.; Sahi (1985), pp. 22ff.; *Religion and Society* 33, no. 3 (September 1986); and Joshi (1986), pp. 39ff. See a critique of Christian ashram in "An International Bi-Monthly Fostering Hindū Solidarity among 650 Million Members of a Global Religion," *Hinduism Today* 8,

Along the same line, we should mention the strong attraction for the Pentecostal movement.

What emerges from all these examples is twofold. First, the appeal of the transcendent remains strong; this visible and temporal "world" is not all that there is. This does not mean that there has to be *another* world, but that there is more than meets the eye. Second, this world matters, suffering is a reality, and the social structures are important.

The whole picture would be lopsided if one were to base an analysis on the few details I have given and draw hasty conclusions. India is much more than all this. India has a soul, and this is Indic culture, not the Indian political nation. India is many nations.

To begin with, the soul of India does not accept the idea, as the first part of this study may seem to suggest, that reality is merely the sum of the social, economic, political, and human factors that can be measured and objectively observed. The Indic soul has another scale of values. Power is the power of the spirit, and happiness is the inner peace of the person. Life is the cosmic unfolding of a relative reality that is evolving, transforming, and undergoing a series of metamorphoses culminating in a leap over to another shore, invisible and therefore indescribable. Meanwhile, except for the sages, who have a glimpse of this transhistorical reality, we wander on this side.

A correction has to be made immediately, if we are to avoid the common mistake of identifying Indic culture with Hinduism, even in the widest sense of the word. The recent violent attacks on Christians in different parts of the country, and the latent intimidations in the name of Hinduism in other areas, are "undermining India" and contrary to the expression of Indic pluralist culture.²¹²

Islām, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and especially the tribal religiousness of India cannot be ignored. I use the Sanskrit vocabulary merely as an example, which is undoubtedly very important but by no means unique. The Hindū reaction, mainly in the South, against Sanskritization, should also be considered.²¹³ Hinduism is not a monolithic block.²¹⁴

The traditional Indian attitude, which is far more widespread and deeply rooted than political officialdom tends to assume, would not be too concerned about the first part of this study.

Yes, this may be true, it would say, but in one way or another life has always been like this. People have struggled and exploited one another, while man-made catastrophes and natural calamities have intertwined with the fate of this world. Wisdom is knowing how to cope with them, not allowing ourselves to be choked by them, not losing sight of (that is faith in) the overall meaning of existence, not placing all our cards on history, saving ourselves for more

no. 6 (November/December 1986): pp. 1, 23, 25, 27. Of particular interest is a survey-study of the Ashram schools initially started by Gandhian workers for the ādivāsīs in the jungle belt in Surat and today run by private organizations.

²¹² See P. Menon (1999), pp. 114–15: "A Campaign of Intimidation," in Karnataka; Swami (1999), p. 113; "A Deadline in Maharashtra" (1999), p. 113; Venkateshan (1999/1), pp. 107–12: "A Hate Campaign in Gujarat"; Muralidharan and Ramakrishnan in *Frontline* cover story (January 30–February 12, 1999), pp. 4–21: "The Politics of Hate," "A Catalogue of Crimes (1998–1999)," "Toward a Hindū Nation."

²¹³ See Ryerson (1988) on the Tamil renaissance and popular Hinduism.

²¹⁴ There was an uproar among the Tamilian members at the conference of state education ministers in New Delhi when the present government proposed the singing of "Sarasvatī Vandana" (Salutation to Sarasvatī Goddess of learning, in the Hindū tradition) in the schools. The Tamilians have their own "Tamizhṭalai razhu" [Praise of Mother Tamil] honoring the language and its rich culture (see Ramaswamy [1999], pp. 92–93). Both "Sarasvatī Vandana" and another Hindū nationalist song that was to be imposed in state schools, "Vande Mātaram" [Salutation to Mother India], were ruled out by the Supreme Court (see Noorani [1999], pp. 94–97).

important and lasting adventures, rising up to spaces that Newton and companions had not the slightest inkling of, and smiling at all those who seem to worry about us far more than we do about ourselves, threatening to instill in us a sense of despair that is totally new to us.

Political conscientization alone leads to despair. It makes people conscious of an impasse that cannot be overcome with the tools offered by religious or political officialdom. However, most of the new elites are not ready to dialogue with another worldview, because neither one side nor the other has a language in which they can understand each other. For such dialogue to be possible one has to enter into the realm of the other and accept its parameters, yet if synthesis is not achieved this creates a sense of disorientation, of being lost.

The voice of the tradition addressing the Western world is clear:

We are not saying to leave us alone, since we are a mixed bunch of people and a great many are not only curious but also envious of all the advantages of the Western culture that are now so eagerly imitated by our "educated classes." What we ask from our hearts is that you do not weaken our identities, that you do not preach, or teach us how to do things better, or dictate how we should help ourselves. We have genuine gurus (in spite of the current—and perhaps past—inflation of holy men) but we do not have messiahs; we have Rājas but not presidents. In reality, we are at a loss to know what statements to make—we are, in fact, as disoriented as your writers so clearly depict us. We do not seek isolation but we love solitude; we wish to learn but at our own pace and in our own way. We fear indoctrination and the "collective bribery" that our wisest sages tell us we are being subjected to by the West, because we know that our young people are restless and dazzled by the obvious achievements of Western civilization on the only level it appears to recognize.

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I have called this second part of my study "Interludes" because I am convinced that none of the described reactions is able to effectively deal with the Indic predicament.

Technology alone cannot solve the problem, not only because technology itself is part of the problem, but also because the problem of India is not a technological problem—unless we beg the question by postulating it.

Withdrawal and noncooperation may bring peace of mind to some, but India has so many glaring socioeconomic injustices that no amount of denying them will satisfy the people.

Protest may be a necessary ingredient for a healthy society, but it is successful only within certain limits, within the rules of the game imposed by others. Protest and rebellion may improve a system, but will not really change it unless the very foundations of society are challenged, and not even the most perfect democratic society will ever tolerate such a challenge.

Is a radical alternative possible? This is the excruciating question.

The Radical Query

What the above facts and figures tell us, and beyond what reforms and rebellions reveal, is that there is a deeper cause for the Indic malaise, and this cannot be emphasized too strongly. Since the beginning of history, slave revolts and mass upheavals (in short, the revolutions of the have-nots) have been ruthlessly put down by the machinery of the powerful institutions. And let us not forget what Gandhi said about "democracy as machinery."²¹⁵ The first two

²¹⁵ See *Harijan*, July 13, 1940, and Chandy (1990), p. 387.

parts of this study have ultimately one single purpose: to underline the sense of urgency, to help us realize that while “we” the intellectuals and the wealthy who write and reflect on the present situation can afford to wait and speculate, the people can no longer do so. The burden has become intolerable, the injustice rampant, the system impossible. The “wretched of the earth” (Frantz Fanon) do exist, and they are both increasing in numbers and becoming more and more “conscientized.” If they voice their woes too loudly they will be annihilated, but the coming bloodshed will have no parallel in world history.

Yet this sense of *urgency* should not prompt us to desperate, violent and blind action. Besides the urgency of the situation we must also realize its *importance*, and to deal with important issues requires time, maturation, perspective, reflection, even patience and serenity. Reality is rhythmic, and to know and respect the rhythms of things is a condition for a sound theory and a requisite of an effective praxis. The third part of this study aims to emphasize the importance of the question without minimizing its urgency.

There are a fair number of perceptive and profound studies on the Indic situation, and we should profit from these. The specific perspective of this study might be best identified by saying that

- Although our topic is India we consider it as representative of the overall world situation.
- Our approach is cross-cultural, and basically religious or metaphysical.

This study deals with what I call the *metapolitical* aspect of the problem. India represents an urgent and important problem not only to itself but also to the whole world.

We have described a number of tensions on the Indian scene. This malaise, in fact, is just an expression of the world situation.²¹⁶ Today we are facing the greatest crisis of the last five hundred years of Western civilization, but because this civilization has now spread across the globe much more extensively than during the “peak” of the Western colonization, this crisis is affecting the whole planet. Contact with other cultures produces what could be termed a *conflict of kosmologies*, as I shall explain.

We are witnessing the *end of history*.²¹⁷ By this I mean the end of historical Man, the end of the dominion of historical consciousness, the end of the temporal future as a paradigm

²¹⁶ See an Indian assessment of the situation: “The global trends are clear: increasing of poverty, inequity and exploitation; global economic crisis, threatening the life chances, even physical survival of millions of human beings; militarization of global economy, technology and industrial R&D; growing militarization of major polities and regimes the world over; accentuation of the repression of, and atrocities on the poor and the deprived; brutalization of the wielders of power at the local level, aided and abated by both national and international elites and by a defensive and hardening world capitalism” (Sheth [1983], pp. 2ff.). This is what we read in softer, more diplomatic language in practically all the official documents of the United Nations, although sometimes the figures are alarming. It has been widely publicized that in the 1990s, 1.2 billion people spent not more than one US dollar per day. At the end of the millennium the figures are worse. On October 24, 1999, the secretary-general of the United Nations affirmed that almost half the world population was living on less than three US dollars per day. In 1999 there were still thirty-six armed conflicts in the world, according to Kofi Annan. In 1979 the OMS prognosticated for the year 2000 an acceptable level of human health. Now, however, this date is being repeatedly postponed. The documents of the PNUD are still more pessimistic—without counting the ecological declaration of the UN Geo-2000 (UNEP).

²¹⁷ See Panikkar (1983/11) using this phrase with a different meaning than that popularized later by Fukuyama.

for human life on earth. The Indic experiment shows us that what is actually at stake is no less than the last six thousand years of the human adventure. We must, therefore, distinguish between two levels, that of modernity and that of historicity. We shall concentrate on the former, while keeping in mind the latter as a background.

I would like to stress once again that I see the Indic adventure as a major event in the History of Being. Either Indic Man is swallowed up by the forgetfulness of Being (Heidegger) and swells the ranks of those defending the onto-theological frontiers of reality, or he allows a new revelation of Being itself to open up a new avenue for human life, or rather for Life itself. We cannot isolate our Indic problem from the world situation. I shall abstain from general considerations, however, and limit myself to the more concrete Indic problem.

An underlying assumption behind "scientific and technological modernization" is belief in the linear cultural evolutionism of humankind. Today India is now modernizing in the direction of science and technology, not because it consciously condemns its three millennia of Indic culture, but because it tacitly assumes that this very culture, if steered right, will lead to the adoption and recognition of the "universal values" of technological culture.

My belief, however, like that of an increasing number of people, is that if we take Indic culture seriously and do not reduce it to mere folklore and "window dressing," it will prove to be incompatible with so-called modern culture and consequently, if we succeed in computerizing human life, it will disappear from the continent. A corollary of this is the prediction of increasing discontent, resistance, rebellion, and bloodshed all over the world.²¹⁸ This is particularly acute in India.²¹⁹

Moreover, I believe that the destiny of Indic culture has a paradigmatic function to perform in the world scene, because many other nations that have already succumbed to this type of modernization are too small and too lacking in strong cultural roots to resist the avalanche of technocratic colonialism. I am not minimizing the role and importance of other cultures of the world (Chinese, African, Amerindian, and so on). They have an important part to play, but there is a special feature to take into account regarding the Indic epochal vocation. The redemption, transformation, or even peaceful (albeit painful) dismantlement of the System can be lastingly effective only if it is an endogenous movement, even of external influence, which is capable of forging a new style of life for the conviviality of the world in general

²¹⁸ "Since 1958, 87 percent of the *very poor nations*, 69 percent of the *poor nations* and 48 percent of the *middle income nations* suffered serious violence. Out of 120 armed conflicts which took place after the Second World War, not less than 115 occurred in the developing Third World" (Poulose [1986], p. 23). Besides local conflicts, moreover, the poor nations have been forced to join the arms race, which is detrimental to their economy and the quality of life of their citizens. "Thus while the poor nations are already overburdened by external debts and stricken by grinding poverty, they are also running an arms race and ruining their poor economy which is already on the verge of collapse. The total value of international arms transfer to the Third World (during the peak period 1970–78) was \$54,537 billion. Annual arms sales to developing nations amounted to around \$20 billion, which has since risen to some \$34 billion (in around 1978)" (Poulose [1986], pp. 24–25). The world has an army of circa 30 million soldiers, and the military death casualties of the world amount to an average of fifteen hundred every day since World War II.

²¹⁹ Here we must emphasize that revolts and violence, in an increasing number of regions of the subcontinent, are the outcome of an acute identity crisis (see Vidyadharan [1988], pp. 8–17). To quote the author: "The roots of this violence lie in our own past. In Indian history. And, while the issues in each case may be different, every movement is, in some way or other, the obsession of an ethnic group to preserve its distinct cultural and political identity against a perceived assault on it" (1988), p. 8.

and the subcontinent in particular. Otherwise we have only the victory of one ideology, and victory never leads to lasting peace. India is certainly a mosaic of cultures and religions. Its two oldest strata, however, are the pre-Aryan or Indo-European and the autochthonous or Dravidian—without entering into the necessary qualification that modern scholarship and present-day political awareness have introduced. In spite of the country's partial Indo-European roots it has remained conspicuously outside Western cultural history,²²⁰ as is clear, for example, from its many different languages. India did not go through the European process of the first centuries, nor the technological revolution of over four centuries ago. It remained outside, maintaining its myths and traditions, which in the industrial West have been all but swept away. This fact makes the Indic culture both more susceptible to temptation and readier to overcome it than many other cultures of the world. The Indic world is halfway between the "Far West" and the "Far East."

After (1) formulating the thesis as succinctly as possible, I shall (2) offer a utopian ideal while suggesting some possible avenues of approaching it, and then (3) conclude with a description of the same scenario by referring to Indra, the symbol in our title. This is not meant as a rhetorical stratagem; I simply believe in the power of myths.

Incompatible Kosmologies

The term *kosmology* has a different meaning here from that generally understood as "cosmology." The latter, in fact, refers to a theory about the world, a reflection of our *logos* about the *cosmos*, a conscious worldview based on the paradigm of modern "scientific" cosmology. Kosmology, on the other hand, refers not to cosmology in the scientific, objectifiable sense of the word, but to *kosmos-legein*, the reading of, or listening to, the cosmos as it manifests itself to us, while we act rather as passive onlookers and hearers than active calculators and shapers. Kosmology is the world-myth of a particular culture or religion and not a doctrine or rationally articulated vision of the universe. We may draw a parallel with the double meaning of the word "mythology." Mythology can mean a theory or doctrine about myths: our *logos* about the *mythoi*—of other cultures, of course, since we cannot detect our own myths in the sense in which we interpret the myths of others. We regard the myths of others as inadequate expressions of what we consider to be the reality when we evaluate them from the viewpoint of our own understanding, that is, our own myth. Yet mythology has another meaning also. Rather than merely our reflection on and rational explanation of it, the myth can mean the actual telling of it, which entails listening and opening our ears to it so that it might guide and instruct us: *mythos-legein*.²²¹ Similarly, kosmology is not a rational doctrine about the world, but the primal awareness of how the cosmos reveals itself to us when we open up to its self-manifestation. It is the primary experience of reality underlying our reflection on it. It is our reception of the cosmos revealing itself to us. It is that sense of reality that we take for granted, the myth of the cosmos in which we live and have our existence. It is not incompatible with cosmology. On the contrary, it underlies any given or elaborated cosmology. Moreover, the relationship is unbreakable. There is no cosmology without the raw material, as it were, of kosmology. Likewise, we cannot talk about kosmology without, even minimally, implying cosmology.

²²⁰ I am basically in agreement with the late Nirad Chaudhuri's thesis that India is Europe, albeit corrupted by the tropical environment (see Chaudhuri [1966]).

²²¹ See Panikkar (1979/XXVII).

Thus the foundation for a sociology of knowledge becomes deeper. Knowledge is not only a function of the sociological status of our mind in time; it is also dependent on our kosmological myth.²²²

In our particular case we detect the radical incapacity of technological civilization to satisfy the aspirations of the Indic *psyché*. Rather than elaborating here on a general critique of *techniculture*,²²³ however, I shall keep within the Indic context.

We could express this by saying that India's *karma* does not tally with the genius of the technological vision of the world. Technology is far less universal than it is claimed to be by the new elites.²²⁴

We do not need to reflect very profoundly to realize why the Western-born techno-civilization does not fit into every culture in the world.²²⁵ There is certainly enough intelligence among the races of the world to understand the know-how of mechanical processes.²²⁶ It is not a question of non-Western peoples being too stupid to master modern technologies²²⁷ but rather of a basic incompatibility between the kosmology of traditional India (including all *dharma*s that have flourished in the subcontinent) and the kosmology underlying technological civilization.²²⁸ Modern techno-science is the Trojan horse that will destroy all other cultures that uncritically introduce "modernity" into their midst.

²²² *The Conflict of Kosmologies* is the title of a study that I expect still to be able to publish. [Unfortunately, this expectation was not realized. However, there is a brief but substantial discussion on the topic in Panikkar's *The Rhythm of Being*, The Gifford Lectures (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), pp. 368–83. *Ed.*]

²²³ We could say that agriculture is the basis of human culture, that is, of the *cultura animi* (as Cicero describes "philosophy"), because it is the cultivation of something that is living and can, therefore, enter into symbiosis with Man. *Techniculture* suggests the cultivation of the machine, which, being inanimate, can only be the object of human exploitation for human benefit or profit. While *Homo faber (techné)* is the first sign of *Homo sapiens*, *Homo technologicus* is a hybrid between reason and machine (see Panikkar [1964/1]).

²²⁴ "So many of us fail to realize that whatever its origins—and they are spread over many continents and centuries—the modern industrial culture is a world culture" (see Moddie [1968], p. 3). Inadvertently, but quite consistently, the author affirms that the opposite statement is equally true: "At present, the economic revolution seems to loom largest, but it must be preceded and accompanied by a modernising mental revolution which alone will make the economic one possible" (p. 132). This "mental revolution" obviously refers to the abjuration of Indic cultures for the purpose of entering this industrialized "mainstream" that leads the author to dream that "the breath of our rich past may then blow refreshing notes through new conch shells of glass, aluminium and concrete, canvass, wood, bronze and fabric" (*ibid.*).

²²⁵ See *Interculture* no. 95 (April 1987): "No to Development?" with a series of articles denouncing the hidden or explicit colonialism of all developments. Yet the New Economic International Order of the United Nations still claims to make accessible to "developing countries" "the advantages of modern science and technology" (Resolution 3201 [S-VI] #4.p) *apud* Rist (1987). See also Sachs (1992).

²²⁶ One hears often about the case of Japan disproving our affirmation. After the country's humbling defeat by the West in the Second World War, Japan seems to have adopted the entire mind-set of its "conquerors." But this can also be seen as a kind of "hidden revenge" since, as is well known, it has beaten the West at its own game. According to many serious studies, Japan is suffering from a cultural schizophrenia that is doomed to eventually explode. For an overall survey, see the three Barloewen & Werhahn-Mees volumes (1986).

²²⁷ To affirm that "we have also great scientists," besides not being true based on the number of science graduates in the country, and besides the fact that they do not feel comfortable in their own land and many of them emigrate or wish to (when not allured by power), would only prove that Indians are capable of being Westernized and India is capable of losing her soul.

²²⁸ See Nandy (1988).

Let me give just one example. Traditional Man considers the world as a holistic though hierarchical and living reality. Everything is interconnected—the realm of the Gods, the world of Man, and the sphere of Nature. Everything is alive. There is cosmotheandric solidarity.²²⁹ Nothing is either purely objective or exclusively subjective. This, however, involves an attitude that is fundamentally different from that which modern scientific civilization must adopt in order to thrive.

We would call it a *transcendental attitude*, which is not the same as a transcendent attitude, that is, an openness to or explicit belief in transcendence. It is the constant awareness that life on earth is merely a sort of “comedy,” “divine” or otherwise,²³⁰ a sort of *lilā* (play), a reenactment of something that is bigger than ourselves and yet takes place within us.²³¹ Whatever their religious underpinnings, rebirth and transmigration, or heaven and moral responsibility, imply the firm belief that we are not private proprietors but actors and spectators of our life. We live as if we were performing a role that is greater than us, conveying a little better or a little worse the very life we have received.

The most common way of describing this is by pointing out that the Sacred (in whatever form) is an essential ingredient not only of the World, but of Man and all human actions. Modern cosmology, while respecting any private belief in God, Gods, or Sacredness, functions with total independence of such convictions. God is a scientifically superfluous hypothesis, and the Sacred is a hindrance to clear and precise scientific thinking. It is not my intention here to criticize either modern science or the old conception of the Sacred. Both are probably in need of transformation, and in this sense the scientific interlude may be a healthy *intermezzo*, although if we become trapped in it, the result could be lethal to the human species.

Let us attempt to spell out the traditional implicit kosmology of the populations of India, as it is lived by the common people, without indulging in philosophical analyses on the nature of time, space, matter, life, and so on.

This basic attitude is revealed in many ways. Here I describe just three. The *first* is a certain indifference, lack of seriousness, a lighthearted, playful, somewhat irresponsible and childish attitude toward the world of labor and machines.²³² Traditional Man does not want to dedicate his most important creative forces to the pursuit of earthly comforts, especially in a proleptic fashion. The danger of an impending atomic disaster is a powerful deterrent for a Western mentality, but it is not particularly daunting to a typically Indic mind (making allowances, of course, for the overgeneralization of “Eastern” and “Western”). It is the present that counts. “For it is another person who dies / and another that will be reborn.”²³³ The linear temporal future is not a main concern.²³⁴

This leads to the *second* aspect of the same basic attitude: real human activity is experienced not so much as a *means* to produce something but as an *end* in itself—inasmuch as any single action is directly related to *mokṣa* via the modification of *karma*. Hence any human activity has a repercussion on the ultimate meaning of life—in whatever sense we may interpret it. This attitude is at loggerheads with the modern obsession with production. Practically

²²⁹ See Panikkar (1993/XXXIII).

²³⁰ Dante's original title was simply *Commedia*.

²³¹ See Bäumer (1969).

²³² Any comment made from a Western perspective on Indian workers in the world of industry, commerce and politics—without quoting Naipaul (1977), N.C. Chaudhuri (1978) and others—is enough to show how uncongenial the Indic genius is to the technological world.

²³³ Śāntideva, *Bodhi* VIII.98.

²³⁴ See Panikkar (1975/2; 1975/7).

all activity in modern life is measured in terms of production, whether spiritual, material, intellectual, and whatever, without necessarily subscribing to a Marxist or a pragmatist ideology. Traditional Man, on the other hand, is not "efficient," not obsessed with making the future better than the past. According to Traditional Man, the modern fad of progress and production leads to the fateful neglect of the present and thus the incapacity of actually enjoying anything.²³⁵ This explains also the frequent complaint that modern "Indian goods" are not well-finished, in sharp contrast with the classical Śilpaśāstra.²³⁶ The moment that a "product" is considered to be only a means, it is treated with benign neglect. How well it is finished becomes insignificant.

We may call this a *techné* mentality as opposed to a technological type.²³⁷ Technology is conceived for the purpose of production. This is why quantity, efficiency, and acceleration matter: the more and the quicker the better, and the effort and toil will be handled by machinery. On the other hand, *techné* must aim at the wholesomeness of the relationship between the doer, the doing, and the done, otherwise it is not worth the effort.²³⁸

Techné (art, wit, *ingenium*, ingenuousness, craft, manu-facture, and so on) is not technology. The difference is specific, and regards more than mere proportion. Technology focuses on the most efficient way to create the end product, multiply the items produced, and speed up the process, since time is also an economic commodity.²³⁹ *Techné*, on the other hand, is concerned with the immediate use, inherent beauty, and value per se of the thing made and its intrinsic relationship with Man. One cannot separate the end from the means. Total objectification is not possible. "May I be the doctor and the medicine," wrote Śāntideva. This is an existential expression that regards both the advaitic vision of reality and the overcoming of the dichotomy between ends and means. The physician cures not because he is an expert who gives medicines, but because the person herself is the medicine. I say "person" and not "individual" because the actual remedy or medical intervention of the physician is still part of the person when the holistic relationship has not been broken. *Techné* is a human invariant. Every culture has *techné*, that is, ways and means to transform things for the benefit of Man and the welfare of society, not excluding the profit of the artisan. The value of the artifact is dependent on its beauty, the joy or suffering of the artisan, the usefulness and meaningfulness of the product, its rarity within the context, and so forth. There is no fixed price possible. Pottery could be a common example, but also housebuilding, forging, weaving, carpentry, and the like. The manufacturing of basic tools such as windmills, fountains, clocks, carts, ponds, and so on also belongs to this category. In short, in a traditional civilization the relation of Man with things and with the earth is both on the human scale and on the earthly scale—in spite of the colossal buildings of despots and tyrants, which, in fact, are exceptions that confirm the rule. Such constructions may be diabolic, but they are not "Faustic."

On the other hand, only one culture in the world has developed technology as the application of measuring and deducing reason in order to accelerate and multiply products with a view to controlling events, that is, the future. This demands a very specific mentality,

²³⁵ See the superficial and frequent observation by foreign tourists that "these poor creatures seem to be happier than us." They are happy not because they are poor (prolonged unaccepted poverty degrades) but because they live in a different, less reductionistic kosmology.

²³⁶ See Boner (1962).

²³⁷ See Panikkar (1984/23; 1984/26, pp. 33–36).

²³⁸ Śāntideva itself distinguishes between people who "work in order to be happy" and those "whose work itself is joy" (Bodhi VII.64).

²³⁹ See the old saying *omnis festinatio a diabolo* [all haste (comes) from the devil] and the modern cliché "Time is money."

which, after a long period of gestation, emerged in sixteenth-century Europe. To cite just a few names, without Galileo there would be no Descartes, and without Descartes there would be no Newton and no modern science.

Likewise, just as there is a fundamental distinction between *techné* and technology, there is also a clear-cut difference between technology and technocracy. Technology, in fact, has two main meanings. The first, more literal meaning refers to the science, knowledge, *logos* that relates to those human constructs that are specifically classified as technological achievements. This brings us directly to the second meaning, which I have often rendered as technological complex and technological civilization, connoting the set of values that underlies and is manifested by the dominion of technology over the minds and lives of the people. In order to avoid this ambiguity I propose to use the word "technocracy" as indicating the actual "power" of the technological worldview.²⁴⁰

The *third* difference could be expressed in this significant metaphor by Śántideva:

Where would I possibly find enough
leather with which to cover the
surface of the earth?
But (wearing) leather just on the
soles of my shoes is equivalent to
covering the earth with it.²⁴¹

Likewise, he goes on to say, we cannot change the external course of things but we can control our minds, and by doing so perhaps be more capable of contributing to the total welfare of the world, not just because of inwardness but also because we will have eliminated all fear and cowardice.²⁴²

The technocratic mentality dreams of filling the whole earth with roads, refrigerators, air-conditioners, videos, and traveling waves on satellites and otherwise.²⁴³ It is bound to objectivity and will search for objective, external solutions to any problem. The traditional mind is bound to subjectivity and will first look within and consider the ways in which we might realistically dissolve the problem. This outward and inward look is not merely a methodological stratagem, but corresponds to an altogether different cosmology. The real world is the world discovered by total human awareness—not by calculus. If we put leather on the soles of our minds we will be able to walk comfortably on any path of life, which means that wherever we go we will not be harmed but we will be able to help improve circumstances. Modern cosmology experiences the world as a great mechanism, and the human task consists in oiling it when rusty, and especially in devising new machinery that can be used more and more comfortably by human beings.

²⁴⁰ Interestingly enough, the Greek *krátos* has a twofold meaning: power and hardness (software and hardware?). And even more symptomatically, the Sanskrit *kratuh*, besides meaning power, force, also denotes understanding, judgment, will, shrewdness. Technocracy would then suggest the hard power acquired by the will to fight triggered by a particular force of a certain type of shrewd skillfulness (intelligence?).

²⁴¹ *Bodhi* V.13.

²⁴² *Bodhi* V.14.

²⁴³ The launching, on March 17, 1988, of the Indian Remote Sensing Satellite from a Soviet cosmodrome generated a great deal of legitimate pride and expectations that the "new eye in space" would contribute to furthering "development." See, for example, R. Ramachandran (1988), pp. 13–14; Sachitanand (1988), pp. 17–18. It is easy to flatter national pride.

Traditional cultures have a vitalistic kosmology, meaning that the universe is regarded and experienced as a living organism.²⁴⁴ Technological civilization, on the other hand, has an underlying mechanistic kosmology, viewing and experiencing the universe as a sophisticated organization. The traditional universe does not need to be "animalistic" in the popular pejorative sense, nor does the scientific world need to be atheistic in the popular pejorative sense. Undoubtedly, however, they are two basically different ways of experiencing reality and thus of being in the world. Can these two approaches be combined into one?

The compromise of turning first to the "sorcerer," and if he fails to resort to allotropic medicine—or, contrarily, to try first the Western-science expert and, failing such, to appeal to the indigenous guru, medicine man, or *ācārya*—may work for a while but in the long run will be ineffective. Likewise, a megalopolis cannot be run by traditional *techné*; a big city is not an agglomeration of villages, or even of cities.²⁴⁵

Granted, one attitude may be as religious as the other. Both have an ultimate concern and their own set of rituals; both use a world of symbols and have a system of beliefs that allow them to be classified as religions. The difference is not about being more or less religious, as both are religious in their own ways. The difference lies in a radically diverse experience of reality.

In more tangible terms we might say they have a different temporal experience of reality. The experience of time is paramount.

Present-day modernity, in the Western-scientific sense specified above, represents not merely a change such as that brought into the world by Islām, for example, but an actual mutation in human consciousness. Historically speaking, however, such mutation is only evident after several generations have elapsed. The transit comes about imperceptibly in the very struggles for coexistence. Today a growing number of thinkers and artists are convinced that the human being is undergoing a fundamental change. We cannot minimize the importance of modern science, and consequently there is no reform, no "patchwork," that can save the present-day system. It is beyond repair. This does not mean it should be violently destroyed, but it must be peacefully (though not painlessly) dismantled by allowing alternatives of all sorts to replace or challenge the system, and eventually transform it.

Coming back to India, however, it might well be that we have reached the point of no return, that the technological inroads are already so advanced as to cause the entire social fabric to collapse if we change direction. One of the features of the technocratic complex is that it offers minor or would-be solutions to the problems it has itself helped to aggravate, provided the accepted myth is "respected." And then there is no end to the proliferation of measures and countermeasures. An unbalanced use of antibiotics (to use an overstatement) has produced the population explosion, which then needs another type of "anti-biotics" to control it. The passage from agriculture to agribusiness claims then to be necessary in order to provide food for the multitudes, which by this very fact becomes more and more dependent on the system, and the latter, in turn, cannot subsist without exploiting the natural resources in a nonrenewable way. One thing leads to the other. All is interconnected.

There is one single point I am attempting to stress here. If we continue in this way there will be no place for traditional cultures and religions. The fabric of the last three thousand years, and, if we take into account the *ādivāsīs* and *ādidravidians*, the basic structures of the last six thousand years, will be called into question and forced to collapse. We see here once again the crucial importance of a theoretical worldview for immediate political decisions.

²⁴⁴ See *The Hymn to the Earth*, AVXII.1.

²⁴⁵ It is known that the infrastructures and services of a city of 10 lakhs cost around twelve times more than for ten cities of 1 lakh each. In this case also, the whole is more than the sum total of its parts.

However well-meaning our intentions may be, to advocate compatibility implies a very superficial idea of both cultures, the traditional and the technocratic. These are not just different ways of doing things, different approaches to solving a problem; they are separate worlds, separate underlying experiences of reality and, therefore, different ways of thinking, feeling, and living. To assume, for instance, that *real* space is what Newton, Einstein, and Prigogine have told us is as narrow-minded and untenable as to imagine that it is the body of God or composed of the ten directions of classical Indic culture. A truly cross-cultural approach to reality is not the triumph of one culture over another. If we assume that reality is "over there" and we only have different interpretations of it, we are absolutizing one notion of reality (a kind of noumenic objectivism "à la Kant") over the others, which we judge from the perspective of one particular culture—generally the dominant, victorious one.²⁴⁶

The conclusion is unambiguous. Either we hold a dignified burial for the ancient cultures of India and proceed toward adopting and adapting the technological civilization for the country, without giving false expectations to "Romantic Indianists and ignorant peasants," or we need to develop some basic alternatives as the fruit of a positive symbiosis between the different cultures operating in the subcontinent. We cannot have it both ways.²⁴⁷

Talk about a "pluralistic culture" does not offer a solution but camouflages the question and, in fact, encourages compliance with the status quo. The idea that a culture must be open, flexible, and nonfanatical and allow the life of its citizens to be expressed in various ways is quite different from defending a truly "pluralistic culture" that, strictly speaking, is a contradiction in terms—unless we reduce the notion of pluralism to the mere tactical tolerance of a plurality of (ultimately irrelevant) opinions, and the notion of culture to mere entertainment and leisure. We cannot have both left-hand and right-hand traffic on the same roads. We cannot have simultaneously and in the same society a capitalistic monetary economy and an economy of subsistence and barter. We cannot organize life on the basis of computer operations while keeping autochthonous and independent units. We cannot have a centralized and a truly decentralized economy. We cannot live simultaneously both in a Newtonian space and Upanishadic *ākāśa*, and so on. Pluralism is a human attitude, not a philosophical system. Pluralism represents the awareness of the nonrationalizable coexistence of mutually incompatible systems of life, thought, and action, which have relative explanations as human phenomena.²⁴⁸ In short, we cannot have an industrialized and computerized society within a world economy and at the same time maintain the traditional Indic institutions with their ways of feeling, thinking, and experiencing the world.²⁴⁹ Perhaps the desire to hold on to another world is sheer sentimentalism and the Indic cultures should simply disappear and give way to the technocratic complex. After all, it would not be the first time that a once-thriving culture is blotted out by an invading foreign civilization, as the remains of the ancient Egyptian and

²⁴⁶ This is what has led me to advocate for a cultural disarmament along with the efforts at military disarmament (see Panikkar [1993/XXXV]).

²⁴⁷ The highest authorities of the country are repeatedly urging the people to adopt a well-balanced combination of tradition and modernity. This is fine as long as it does not identify modernity with Western technology, but it is unrealistic when it comes to technology. "Blend modern farming with traditional wisdom," is what R. Venkataraman, the president of India, advocated on February 15, 1988, in his opening speech at the International Congress of Plant Physiology in New Delhi (see *The Hindū*, February 16, 1988). President K. R. Narayanam spoke of a "technology of hope" at the inauguration of an "Ecotechnology Center" on July 29, 1998 (see Krishnakumar [1998], pp. 89–92).

²⁴⁸ See Panikkar (1979/2; 1996/50, pp. 247–57).

²⁴⁹ See Panikkar (1977/13) for the two basic attitudes toward death around which two different societies will be built.

Amerindian cultures so clearly demonstrate.²⁵⁰ Perhaps these submerged cultures serve only to contribute, as irritants and stimulants, to the victorious civilizations. Perhaps they persist as human archetypes and underground forces, although these alone do not form a culture and may, on the contrary, be hidden obstacles to the flourishing of the victorious culture.

The mortality of cultures is a key factor here in emphasizing the importance and the difficulty of the problem.

Alternatives

What I have attempted to point out is that the technocratic mentality, with its *problem-solving* (as opposed to problem-dissolving) trend and *mechanistic approach*, seems powerless to find a solution to world problems. Today, increasing numbers of people worldwide are unwilling to simply wait for an uncertain future, which looms darker and darker (except for the elites, and then only on a short-term basis). The myth of progress has collapsed. To devise *more* technocracy, *more* energy, and *more* sophisticated gadgets, to project further into the linear *future*, oblivious of other dimensions of reality, is no longer convincing. We cannot develop indefinitely. The world is finite. A cross-cultural approach, therefore, is imperative.

With this approach, we must resist the tendency to strive toward solving the present-day problems while uncritically accepting the parameters of the assumptions. The technocratic mentality accepts that these are unresolved problems, but does not question the very basis on which it stands. It tolerates, and even encourages, the pursuit of better solutions, but cannot call its basic assumptions into question. It has become a myth, and the power of a myth lies in the fact that it has no room for another because it always appears as an immediate truth.

One can understand the cries of urgency. If we are suffering from an acute toothache and have a painkiller at hand we are likely to take it, rather than opting for a more natural, deeper, but slower therapy. Alcoholics and drug addicts, alarmingly, reveal the same tendency.

As I have said many times, to demand one single alternative means to fall into the same technocratic mentality. There is no one alternative, but there may be alternatives. And yet, most so-called alternatives are merely reforms, different modes of solving a particular problem, which on the whole accept the vision of the technocratic world and form part of it. The real question is not the solution to the problem, but the problem itself. On the other hand, a radical alternative risks either being incomprehensible within the parameters of the so-called real world, or being immediately discarded for the fact that it would destroy the very foundations for possible change as seen from the viewpoint of the status quo. Democracy, for example, may accept a democratic change but not tolerate any modification of its ground rules. The problem is delicate.

There is no alternative. To accept one possible alternative is to fall into the trap of the technocratic view of monistic thinking. Sheer dialectical opposition, much less violence, are not conducive to anything, even if the other party were able to overpower technocracy. The remedy may prove worse than the malady. After all, not everything is negative about technocracy, which has already followed a process of adjustment to the human condition. The roots of technocracy are much deeper; it is not a question of right or left, socialism or capitalism. In actual fact, by analyzing the word "alternative" we can understand more clearly the gravity of the problem. *Alter* may be interpreted as a negation of *idem* (the same, the

²⁵⁰ See Viola (1990): "The Heroic Ordeal and Victory of American Indian Culture"; Neihardt (1988), relating the history of Black Elk, the Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, and Deloria (1973), a challenging call for a return to Amerindian religiousness.

self) and thus as a negation of our *identity*, or we can take *alter* for what it truly means. The word "alternative" derives not from *aliud* (other), but from *alter*, which, strictly speaking, means "the other" of both sides, that is, we and the other. The other is my "other" as much as I am the other's "other." We are both other to each other. The *alter* is not the non-other, the "another," but the intrinsic polarity of the other. *Alter* implies the "other" (side). The *alter* is the other side, therefore, but not necessarily the other possibility of solving the *same* problem(s) in a dialectical opposition. The situation of our world does not allow for any alternative of this type. The authentic alternative is not dialectical but dialogical, or rather dialogal. In an idealistic system the opposition is the logical opposition between A and non-A; it is the contradiction. But the nature of reality does not need to be idealistic and thus dialectical. The nondialectical alternative is not the pure otherness (*aliud*) but the "alterity" of a given thing. It is a not a question of destroying the *idem*, the identity of the thing, but of discovering the other side of reality. This other side does not need to have the same problems. It is not about finding answers or more satisfactory "solutions," but dissolving the questions and overcoming the problems or, as the original term *problemata* suggests, of not "placing before ourselves" the very obstacles we are supposed to overcome. Dialectical thinking is not the only way of exercising that innate human activity we call thinking. This is the real challenge of interculturality: the awareness of kosmological pluralism. Technological thinking is only one way of calculating the behavior of detectable phenomena. This is the deception of the same technocratic approach whose roots are anchored deep down in human history.

In the words of a Buddhist saint, echoing the voice of a different cosmology, "Why are embodied creatures not regarded as limbs of life?"²⁵¹

There may be alternatives, however, as I said earlier, though my reasons are deeper than the obvious strategic observation that since we cannot solve everything it is better to allow different groups to tackle different aspects of the problem. This method aims to achieve a solution, in fact, by dividing the problem into smaller portions—ecological, political, economic, and so on, following the well-known (and fallacious) Cartesian rule. However, wanting to make things easy so as to avoid discouraging people is both wrong in itself and bad policy. The human predicament today can be neither minimized nor compartmentalized. Reality is not the great machine that the mechanistic worldview would have us believe. It is a whole, and as such is not equal to the sum of its parts. Neither does this perspective offer alternatives, precisely because there is no alternative. The only possible alternatives are those that can prepare the way for a transformation through the temporary emphasis and complementarity of another side—not of the problem (which is not necessarily the same) but of the overall state of affairs. Any alternative that is not capable of revealing the other side is not an alternative.

This being the case, it is vital to stress the naïveté of any total destruction (inappropriately called absolute alternative), not only because it is *de facto* impossible to ignore the existence of technocracy, but also because it is *de jure* improper. We are living in a world that does not allow us to ignore the technocrats, who, on the other hand, are not absolutely evil.

This does not by any means prevent us from struggling against the technocratic complex, as I will explain later, but it puts us on a different track, which is perhaps more difficult, but it is also certainly more fruitful. It might also help us learn the lessons of history. As Cicero wrote centuries ago, *In eadem es navi*, "you are in the same boat." We are all in the same "space-ship," the same human condition, sharing the same destiny. No form of Manicheism,

²⁵¹ *Bodhi* VIII.114.

Puritanism, or absolutism ("we are right, you are wrong"), even if temporarily victorious, has ever led to lasting peace.

There are, in fact, countless movements that claim to be alternatives.

Therefore, the word "alternatives," in the plural, can be understood as another name for *pluralism*, that is, the recognized coexistence of mutually exclusive lifestyles, views of reality, opinions, and systems of thought. Not *aliud* (in the sense of the other), but *alter* (in the proper meaning of the alterity inherent in any experience of otherness, which is mutual). Ultimately, what is at stake here is the ontological status given to the epistemological *reductio ad unum*, as if what is necessary for the intellect were also an axiom for Being. We cannot understand without reducing the known thing to a degree of oneness. This, however, does not mean that reality should be intelligible.²⁵² To put it ironically, it is a question of playing the game fairly without recognizing the rules.

An important notion to introduce here is that of *cultural relativity*, which should not be mistaken for *cultural relativism*. The latter, besides defeating its own purpose (if there are no criteria of truth whatsoever, this very affirmation undermines its own credibility), would not help in a situation in which our generations have witnessed Auschwitzes, Hiroshimas, Partitions, and civil wars of all sorts. We need unambiguous criteria to condemn such monstrosities. Cultural relativity, on the other hand, stands for at least three basic insights.

First, each culture segregates its own criteria of truth according to its own constitutive myth. Second, these criteria, while valid within the mythic horizon of the relative culture, are not absolute, even in the same culture, inasmuch as each culture is perpetually unfinished, uncompleted. Third, if cross-cultural criteria are to be developed, this must be done by the two cultures together, once they establish common ground on which meaningful interaction can take place.²⁵³ It is not easy to deal with fanatics, but making martyrs of them is not only countereffective; it also destroys part of ourselves while killing the "other."

Cultural relativity, in short, refers to the understanding that any perception, experience, or knowledge is related to its particular horizon and depends on the myth that makes the perception, experience, or knowledge possible.²⁵⁴ Just as the shadow of our body cannot do away with the body itself, so the power of our own thinking cannot overstep the limits of what it perceives as thinkable. The challenge, danger, and beauty of a truly cross-cultural encounter are that it makes us somehow aware of the otherwise invisible horizon of our respective myths, thereby allowing us to relativize our absolutes.

From my own point of view, I outright condemn concentration camps, torture, and dictatorships, but I also realize that from other perspectives people may justify such measures or accept them as exceptions or minor evils. I will strongly oppose those who defend what I regard as aberrations, therefore, but I will not condemn them to concentration camps or drop atom bombs on them. Pacifism does not mean killing those who defend the death penalty.

Let me give just one example of cultural relativism that is very relevant to our general topic. "All Men are equal" seems to be a general truism of modernity, at least since the French Revolution slogan of *égalité* became common currency. Indeed, in a modern-day context the saying is not only meaningful, it is also a principle of justice, social order, and even human dignity.²⁵⁵

Outside this context the saying does not make much sense, appearing as a reductionistic and lifeless abstraction. One would rather affirm that "all Men are different," that every person

²⁵² See Panikkar (1990/33).

²⁵³ See Panikkar (1992/32).

²⁵⁴ See Panikkar (1984/19).

²⁵⁵ The preamble of the Indian Constitution states, "equality of status and of opportunity."

is unique and thus incommensurable with any other because there is no "*tertium comparationis*." Human equality is not an anthropological category; thus it cannot be applied to a being that claims dignity that is nontransferable and therefore nonquantifiable. To apply equality to Men would amount to equalitarianism against human dignity. It chops off all personal identity. It assumes that general and abstract rules can be applied in dealing with truly human problems. Personal conflicts are more than merely superficially objectifiable quarrels. From this point of view, equality is seen as the acme of reification in human relations. There is no place for the personal; individuals are reduced to numerical "identity cards," mere numbers. Human beings cannot be treated as peanuts—or as classical atoms.²⁵⁶ Any system that strives to create a degree of order and harmony in a community whose size defies personal knowledge, say of over one lakh of people, demands a kind of objectification that is incompatible with a life experience that is more quality-based. It demands a sort of mechanistic and mathematical calculus that leaves no room for a more vitalistic and qualitative approach to real life. We have here two different notions of what reality is and what Man's place is in it. Do we sacrifice the human person for the idea or the idea for the human person?

In tackling this truly formidable quest for alternatives there are three pitfalls that must be avoided.

The first is *fatalism*. "Whether we like it or not, technology is here to stay; we cannot turn back the clock of history; even if we wanted to, it would be impossible"—such expressions are heard everywhere, both within and outside the Establishment.

Of course, dismantling the technocratic complex is a more difficult task than militarily defeating the United States. Not very long ago we would have encountered a similar fatalistic reaction in the United States if we spoke in favor of the abolition of slavery: "We must treat slaves humanely, but we should not destroy all our economic fabric. The cure would be worse than the disease." It was also said not long ago that "the Soviet System is unbreakable," and still today we hear that "the supremacy of the United States cannot be contested." Similarly, "We must humanize technology and not allow our economic empires to collapse, or the world will die of hunger and disease." No doubt also, to follow the hint of the examples, that the victory Vietnam could dream of was not a military victory but an ideological one, and that for this reason it had to count on a large number of North Americans sharing the same ideals as the Vietnamese.

Certainly, in reference to the example of slavery, the abolishing of an institution seems often to have actually worsened the conditions of the supposed beneficiaries, if we look at the general situation of the "have-nots" throughout the world. One tragic example from history, regarding one of the darkest chapters of the Christian West, is that of the saintly Bartolomé de las Casas and his struggle for justice, ending with the passing of a law prohibiting Amerindian slavery—a victory, to be sure, but also one of the factors that contributed to the slave trade of Africans to the New World. And who would have thought it possible, a few years ago, that the Soviet Empire and all its satellites would collapse? There is no doubt, moreover, that the recent European changes are in part the result of the thousand small actions of small groups here and there.

All these lessons should teach us to be humble, circumspect, judicious, and farsighted in proposing alternatives. There is a wholistic relationship that cannot be ignored, and drastic remedies can do more harm than good. At the same time, however, the classical political prudence that has existed since Aristotle should not be confused with mere Realpolitik.

²⁵⁶ Significantly, contemporary physics is beginning to realize that not even elementary particles are strictly singular.

In short, I do not subscribe to fatalism for the reason that every enterprise is difficult. Most movements of independence have been arduous undertakings, and the overthrowings of dictatorships were often regarded as insurmountable. It all depends on personal courage, on one hand, and the ripeness of time, on the other. Without minimizing the former (that is, the value of and need for prophets) I would say that the time factor is essential, and emphasize the importance of arousing public awareness so that what today may seem an unreachable utopia will one day become possible. The idea of reaching this utopia may be more plausible once we become aware of the dire consequences of not changing the status quo. It is one thing to be a pessimistic prophet of doom, but quite another to be an irresponsible "optimist" titillating the unconscious desires of the well-established that one should not disseminate discontent. It is significant that in the world today the most varied currents of thought generally agree that the technocratic route is bound to lead to catastrophe.²⁵⁷ Fatalism is easier to overcome when we realize that the alternative in the dilemma is simply total disaster.

The second pitfall we have to overcome is *paternalism*. A great many of the discussions on these issues remind me of the unequal confrontation between religions and cultures in the colonialistic age, in which only one side was vested with power, money, prestige, and dominion and controlled the language and the rules of the encounter. What could the Hindū do, the peasant, the non-English speaker, the poor, the naked, in the face of the ruler, the refined urbanite, the native English speaker, the rich and well-dressed? Today the situation has changed little. What can the protesters do, the trespassers of "private property" (atomic enclosures), the hippies, idealists, "terrorists," new-agers, women activists, pacifists, ecologists, and so on, against those who possess the data, hold the power, and control the media, politics, and laws? No authentic dialogue can be held in such conditions. It is a positive sign of our times that not all these movements have been crushed. The conscientization of the people of the world is on the increase.

David and Goliath were not able to dialogue; they could only insult each other. Today the formidable state machinery often adopts the practice of confronting demonstrators with riot police, who must avoid looking into the eyes of peaceful protesters lest they become soft-hearted when "law and order" are transgressed. I personally believe that David should not start the fight. Let us not forget, in fact, that David won the battle but eventually lost the war—a war that is still going on—and that for every victorious David there are hundreds of triumphant Goliaths.

Another characteristic of this pitfall is that of eliciting a fear of change. The paternalistic attitude intimidates with veiled threats all those who dare to question the sacrosanct principles proclaimed by the Establishment: "It is dangerous to oppose and provoke the powers that be, while you have everything to gain by accepting the established order."²⁵⁸ Many of the institutions of the First World are examples of this subtle invitation to yield, because we are given individual freedom in theory. The price of academic freedom, for instance, is often political irrelevance.

The third pitfall is *conservatism*. The alternative to modern culture is not the Romantic ideal of going back to the idealized "primitive life" of a "good savage." What is called into

²⁵⁷ To quote an Indian source, as far back as in 1926 in a paper delivered at the International Congress of Philosophy at Harvard University, S. Radhakrishnan warned the world that science, technology, and behaviorism were on the wrong path: "electrons and protons do not clear up the mystery of reality. . . . God and soul cannot be treated as mathematical equations" (see *The Hindū*, February 11, 1988, on the occasion of Dr. Radhakrishnan's birth centenary celebration).

²⁵⁸ See the message by Nobel Peace laureate (1991) Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest since 1989 in Myanmar (Burma), in *The Hindū*, February 28, 1993 [later released in November 2010 (*Ed.*.)]

question is not the mere preservation of the ancient patrimony, or worse, the one-sided interpretations of fundamentalistic reactions. The alternative is neither immobilism nor the uncritical glorification of the past. If we do not have other "models" than those of the past and those of the present it is due to a lack of creative imagination. The alternative to the present is not the past, but a new "future," as the fruit of our creative work rather than the result of the inertia of vested interests or a reaction to repressed feelings.

Conservatism should not be mistaken for respect and even admiration for tradition. To "conserve" a tradition is to suffocate it. A tradition is such not when it is conserved, but when it is transmitted (as the origin of the word indicates)—and transmission entails change and critique as the tradition is handed down and brought "up to date."

Furthermore, alternatives do not require "new" models. This is part of the pitfall: "thinking" in models, a procedure that imprisons real life and thought itself in the straitjacket of the modern scientific (or, indeed, any other) method. Real, creative thinking is not based on paradigms like scientific hypotheses that are put forward for the sole purpose of having them confirmed or disproved through experimentation. Authentic thought does not assume an "idealistic" belief in the primacy of "ideas" and their dominion over reality. "Creative thinking," as the academic and wishful phrase says, actually creates reality, and is as much action as theory. It is true contemplation. It listens to the language of Being and speaks through us. As the *Vedas* and other Sacred Scriptures say,²⁵⁹ through *vāc* (the Word) everything has been made. An alternative is not a reform, nor is it an absolutely new thing. It is the other side of the alterity of the other. Identity and difference are related notions.

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Having established this, I would like now to examine three different fields that are relevant to the Indian situation: cultural, political, and religious. This tripartite division is made for heuristic reasons, but I am well aware that the three fields are intrinsically connected and cannot be completely separated.

Again, let me emphasize that the following *considerations* are not full-fledged alternatives, since such would require a degree of both praxis and theory that I myself cannot claim to possess, nor perhaps can anyone. The term "consider," meaning "to think about the stars," refers to the delicate astrological endeavor of discovering the harmony of the sidereal universe, which also composes the fabric of our human and historical reality. Using the word in its original meaning, therefore, I would like here to put together some constellations in the firmament of our universe today.

The Cultural Conversion

In India and abroad the problem of modernization has been widely investigated. Most of the studies, however, accept the "realistic" view that "there is no way back" and look for solutions within the status quo of so-called modern civilization, that is, the technocratic complex of today's prevailing socio-politico-economic system of qualified capitalism and reformed socialism. Both accept a scientific technological kosmology.

On the other hand, quite often the voices that are raised against the status quo are those belonging to every sort of revivalist fundamentalism.

If we delve more deeply into tradition and modernity we might be able to find a middle way or, rather, get to the root of the problem. This does not mean that we should overlook the

²⁵⁹ See *BU* I.2.5, etc.

more immediate remedies; what we question, however, is the very concept of health that these remedies are supposed to restore.²⁶⁰ If the system has a terminal illness, superficial remedies can only prolong its agony. On the other hand, we should not despise micro-solutions (for individuals and groups) for the fact that they are at loggerheads with the projected macro-solutions. An almost tragic dialectic is at work here, which is why the situation is so serious. This subject takes us beyond the boundaries of India and confronts us with the very nature of our present-day modernity.

It has been rightly pointed out by many sociologists "that the dichotomous nature of tradition and modernity which has been emphasized is really untenable in the light of reality."²⁶¹ For the sake of linguistic clarity, let me introduce the notion of *innovation*. We could say then both that each living *tradition* represents a thrust toward *innovation* and that any kind of *modernization* invariably has *traditional* roots. Furthermore, since it is not stagnant, each *tradition* tends to innovate itself not only from within but also by accepting inspiration from outside. Likewise, modernization has an exogenous element that is successful only inasmuch as it finds resonance and acceptance in the heart of the very situation it attempts to modernize.

In India, however, modernity does not usually mean innovation. It is practically synonymous with imitating the model of the technocratic society of Western origin. The official "modernization" of India does not follow a symbiotic pattern, but rather the model of an electronic civilization.

Let me try to describe some features of this cultural conversion. I use the word "conversion" to express the original meaning of the word: to turn around (from the Latin *vertere*, or Sanskrit *varṭate*), to change, to convert by the most diverse transpositions.

In this sense, the Indic culture is in need of conversion. It needs to return to the deep recesses of its soul and, at the same time, turn toward the spirit of mankind's new situation. Again, I use this word in its classical meaning, not in the polemic way of modern India when discussing about "conversion" to established religions as a kind of shifting from one allegiance to another. Paradoxically, the first stage of this conversion is an inversion—as I will explain.

India is proud of having achieved political independence without formally going to war against the colonial power. This speaks highly of both, but it also has its darker side, such as the Partition with its innumerable victims, as well as other unsolved problems like communalism, the predicament of the Dalits, and the dire poverty of the masses. The lack of a founding "revolution," however, with the native government simply taking over from the colonial power, had a peculiar effect; practically all that makes India a modern nation, in fact, has been inherited from Britain. The Rājās, Rānas, and Maharājās—who, for all their anachronism and possible degradation, nevertheless represented a certain autochthony—were stripped not only of their power but also of their authority and symbolism.²⁶² They were considered beyond redemption. This did not happen with the

²⁶⁰ The metaphor is intended. In allotropic medicine, health is the proper functioning of the organs and the criterion (according to institutional medicine) is to be fit for labor. In Ayurvedic medicine, health is measured by the joy and well-being that the person experiences.

²⁶¹ Damle (1983), p. 7. The author quotes M. Singer, E. Shils, the Rudolfs, P. N. Mital, and of course, Max Weber, among others.

²⁶² This symbolism was even enshrined in the Constitution. It needed an amendment in order to abolish the last remnant of the symbolism: the privy purses. See the negative and outspoken reaction of C. R. Rajagopalachari when in 1968 the government decided to deprive the ex-rulers of their purses: "Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Vallabhbhai Patel and myself stand to be dishonored. . . . The negotiations regarding the privy purses and privileges of the Princes were concluded when I was Governor General and not a mere figurehead. Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel are gone. But I share in the responsibility of

symbols of the British Rāj.²⁶³ Parliamentary democracy, legislature, the legal process, the military, administration, the economy, commerce, industry, education—in short, the entire machinery of the modern state—is a replica of the Western model or, rather, the Anglo-Saxon paradigm.²⁶⁴

This has had a rather important consequence. The “natives” of India, mainly villagers (that is, the overwhelming majority of the people), feel like strangers in their own country. When the British Rāj was in power, the Indian peasant was aware that the country was under foreign rule. Once the “colonialists” left, however, their successors continued to act in the same way, except for one difference—while the British had been paternalistic but distant, the “educated” Indians are generally more blunt, if not outright rough, in their treatment of their “less educated” co-nationals.

In other words, most of the people feel estranged, disoriented, and unfamiliar with these new manners, language, reactions, and customs. A compendious example is the attitude and behavior of petty bureaucrats, and often also of the higher echelons. When dealing with the “public,” even the most minor government employees believe more or less unconsciously that they are representing the Viceroy of New India, and so do also the simple peasant or citizen who stands timidly before a *sarkari* (official) on the other side of the window. Neither is aware that “minister” means servant and not the opposite. In short, the native culture of the country became the tolerated culture, and the culture of independent India was that which had been imported.²⁶⁵ The English-speaking elite dictated the rules and imposed the “democracy” to be followed.²⁶⁶ The Congress Party, mainly based on inertia and strategic policy, retained a degree of superficial indigenization, but the entire dynamics of most of the political parties were certainly not endogenous to Indic culture.²⁶⁷ Parliament, which is supposed to represent the people, speaks mainly a language that the majority does not understand. However, in a technocratic system, this does not matter much, since technocracy also speaks a language that most people cannot grasp. Technocratic society requires an overspecialization and a

maintaining honor in this affair and it is my particular and personal duty to protest most strongly” (see R. Gandhi [1984], p. 335 [16/XI/68]). When in 1969 the amendment did not muster the majority in the Lok Sabha, and the then president Giri signed an executive order abolishing all princely rights, Rajaji commented sadly: “The union government has gone berserk” (p. 367).

²⁶³ Architecture offers here an interesting testimony. Most of the palaces of the “princes” of India are now in ruins, others became private mansions or, more significantly, hotels for tourism. Yet most of the buildings of the Rāj are now government mansions.

²⁶⁴ The writer has had the opportunity of developing, in collaboration with two ambassadors of two Spanish-speaking countries in Delhi, a project for an Indo-Latin Institute of Culture to be established in Goa, taking advantage of the Portuguese heritage of that state, when Pandit Nehru was still prime minister. In spite of minor technicalities, the then prime minister could not see any need for any other cultural bridge with the West than the British-American one. Besides some literary achievements, what else has the rest of the West contributed to “world civilization”? we were asked.

²⁶⁵ It has been said, ironically and truthfully, that “the end of the British rule . . . and the birth of the new sovereign state, India, constitute a political version of the metempsychosis by which the old British soul has transmigrated into the new Indian body politic” (see Balasundaram [1968], p. 9).

²⁶⁶ R. Kohari (1976) rightly points out that immediately after Independence, India developed a “typically Indian response” to handling political issues that had been prepared during the struggle for Independence. But he also describes how “an imported institutional framework,” which he calls “the Westminster model of Government and politics,” took the upper hand and developed, especially after 1967, the “administrative state” because it was inherently in the “Anglo-Saxon model.”

²⁶⁷ “The superimposition of a unified system of foreign values over a system of conflicting native values is our way of achieving national unity” (see Balasundaram [1968], p. 10).

technicism that only the most qualified experts can master. And here again technocracy betrays its own ideological foundation by organizing the rational government of a country on the basis of its experts' conclusions.

To be sure, once the ball of independence was set into motion—with the Nehrus, Patels, Jinnahs, and others at the top, Gandhi at the bottom, C. R. Rajagopalachari in the shadows, the British in the foreground, and the immense problems in the background—there was practically no other way out; a secular republic was the only workable solution. My point here is not technical but cultural; I am attempting to emphasize the enormous power of cultural assumptions. Once the problem was presented and regarded in this light, there was no other alternative. British tolerance of Gandhiji was not as extraordinary as the patience and acceptance shown to him by the leaders of the Congress Party and forgers of political independence in India and Pakistan. All had an Indian heart, but the minds of most of the leaders were already focused on Western models.

This state of affairs was and is prevalent not only in the political field. Education also no longer follows traditional patterns. Indigenous values have been automatically downgraded, leaving a few token symbols here and there. The elite have become more and more Westernized, while the masses feel increasingly displaced. Administrative services all run according to technocratic patterns, because once the model has been adopted they cannot be run any other way. However, since the minds of the "officers" do not run along the same lines, the result is bureaucratic chaos.

In short, the Indic indigenous cultures are strangers in their own land, grafted, as it were, onto the main culture of the future: technocracy. The common people are plagued by an often unconfessed but unmistakable inferiority complex. They are told they are uneducated, illiterate, uncultured, and so they feel. They have still to learn the ways of a foreign culture.²⁶⁸

Native values, if at all acknowledged, are justified because they are at the service of the "national goals," which are all viewed from the perspective of modern Western values. Sanskrit, Urdu, Ayurvedic medicine, indigenous arts and crafts, dance, idioms, and tribal customs are extolled (if at all) only because they are at the service of the technocratic civilization. They contribute to our GNP, create prestige abroad, attract tourism, give us a distinctive color, and make us different, because we entrust our commercial transactions to Lakshmī, invoke Sarasvatī in our university functions, and write "Indyan Aerlains" in *devanāgarī*, but this is all.²⁶⁹ The framework is technological and scientific, the incidental additions are indigenous colors. Republic Day and the New Delhi Parade could well serve as an example of what I am saying;²⁷⁰ the daily newspapers in English and vernacular languages are another. Indigenous culture is valued to the extent that it serves the technological scale of values. Except for some private recent initiatives—for instance, Ayurvedic and Unani medicines have been revalued only because modern-day allotropic science affirms that they may also help in certain cases and counteract its weaknesses. India is proud of its engineers and medical physicians throughout the world, but not in its villages. The pay, in fact, is too low; professionals prefer to emigrate.

²⁶⁸ Over three decades ago I remember a subtly ironic article in *Encounter* (London) that pointed out that, despite all the rhetoric of the independent political nations that were then mushrooming, none of them wanted to go back to their old traditional methods but all adopted the Western manners and patterns of the often-insulted colonial powers. How true this is. Africa is a more tragic example than India. But this is no consolation.

²⁶⁹ A paper from South India (which I prefer not to cite) regretted the Ayodhya incident of December 6, 1992, partly because it was detrimental to foreign tourism.

²⁷⁰ See the brilliant and ironic description of "Republic Day" in Larson (1995), pp. 1–8.

This estrangement of the people in their own country amounts to more than the psychological observation one might make when entering any bazaar and speaking English, or seeing how the masters speak English among themselves when they do not want to be understood by the servants. It is more than the sociological observation that English is essential for higher jobs, research, and foreign travel. It is the cultural observation that modern India is striving to adopt a "superior culture"—that of the new elites who are busy absorbing and propagating it—and supersede certain "inferior cultures" that the so-called noneducated masses, with their superstitions, primitive ways, and lack of skills, continue to uphold. When presidents, prime ministers, or Supreme Court justices address the Indian masses, they adopt the paternalistic, condescending, and benevolent language used by teachers, preachers, and "educated" leaders when speaking to the ignorant.

In a country as vast as India there are, of course, significant exceptions. One example is Kerala, where Malayalam has not been suffocated by English, vernacular literature is flourishing, a number of local newspapers and magazines have a wider circulation than those in other languages (including English), the culture and lifestyle are still indigenous, and the Keralites are experimenting with the symbiosis I mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, however, the delicate balance is being upset by the impact of the quick money earned by emigrants to the "Gulf Countries."

Nevertheless, on the whole the country is officially following the model of Western civilization presented as a universal paradigm, thus creating the myth that "progress" means eliminating the "backwardness" of traditional ways and modernization demands the "hard labor" of a modern (technocratic) society. Culture is reduced to arts and crafts, cosmetic accessories, harmless anachronistic customs, folklore, and amusement—in other words, culture as entertainment.

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This is the prevailing myth that is pervading not only India but the entire world. My constant hope is that India might substantially contribute to the already visible reaction.

It would be hypocritical, narcissistic, and superficial to place the burden solely on the prevailing Western culture. Are the people of South Asia ready to take on this role? Are the cultures of this part of the world capable? This is the question.

To change the present state of affairs would involve not a "revolution" (that is, the overturning of the system by replacing one home guard with another) but something much more radical. We ought to have learned the lessons of history by now. What I am referring to here is not some sort of "aesthetic surgery," but real cultural alternatives, which may be broken down into four different stages.

Inversion of Roles

The framework I am advocating is the opposite of that which has been adopted in independent India: village life, small-town lifestyle, traditional values, and indigenous arts, crafts, science and laws. In short, Indic wisdom should provide the pattern of the traditional framework into which the integrable aspects of Western culture may be inserted. At the same time, traditional cultures should be open to improvement, enhancement, criticism, and correction by the modern scientific view, and not the opposite, as is the case today. What I am suggesting is that the substance be Indic, and that this substance be willing to receive all elements that are able to support it, or to use a different metaphor, that the Indic culture be the tree trunk onto which Western contributions may be grafted.

This proposal is not merely sociological; it refers above all to ways of thinking and living.

This is not an easy task. How can it be, considering that the entire infrastructure of modern society represented by urban life is a mere copy of the Western model? Here praxis has the primacy over theory. If the praxis of modern life is that imposed by the technocratic complex, there is little hope that the autochthonous cultures can do more than play second fiddle to "modern living." How can it be otherwise when our roads are invaded by cars and trucks and our cities are growing cancerously into megalopolises, destroying not only nature but also the human societal fabric while generating every kind of pollution, when our houses do not come up to the worst Western standards, and business is conditioned by the world market and international economy?

The *first step* of the alternative I am suggesting is the restoring of the subcontinent's traditional cultures based on their original inspiration, by purifying them with the experience of past centuries. Paradoxically, this "conversion" demands an inversion of the relationship between the two cultures (or group of cultures), with the traditional cultures playing the host and having the conviction that they can succeed and possess the discernment needed to assimilate all that is positive from the West, so they may be able to grow rather than being superseded. In other words, we should let the traditional cultures of the country regain their independence and play the host to Western culture, rather than merely becoming the lackeys of modernity. India is a (relatively) independent state but it is not (yet) an independent nation, and it is certainly not an independent culture (without forgetting that true independence is *inter-in-dependence*, as I have elsewhere attempted to explain with the notion of *ontonomy* as a dynamic balance between heteronomy and autonomy).²⁷¹

Traditional India must establish its own rules and the pace at which changes should be effected, and provide an understructure that is different from the industrial model proposed by the media and business. It has become almost a cliché, both in the country and worldwide, that Indians have an outstanding capacity to absorb every culture that has ever entered the bosom of "Mother India." This was somewhat true in the past, but ever since Independence the exact opposite appears to be happening. India as a whole is being absorbed, almost swallowed by Western civilization. It is a fact that much of Indian history has been written from the point of view of Western historiography. It is worth pointing out, incidentally, that Western culture is equally capable of absorbing and assimilating foreign values. Every living culture has this same characteristic of syncretistic osmosis.

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In part, the basically fundamentalistic modern Hindū reaction that I am describing here derives from the awareness that India in general, and Hindū India in particular, is losing her identity and that the much-magnified Hindū power of absorption and tolerance is being used to undermine the *sanātana dharma*. Hindū India is tired of being stripped of its identity and feels threatened. This reaction, which is not new but has long been latent to varying degrees in militant Hinduism, recently came to the fore of the national scene following the Ayodhya incident. Hindutva has become the emblem of a certain type of Hindū fundamentalism in political life and has met with a positive response in vast areas of the country, as demonstrated by two recent polls that brought democratic victory to the BJP and its allies.²⁷²

²⁷¹ See Panikkar, *Worship and Secular Man* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), esp. the chapter on secularization, pp. 28–52.

²⁷² [In 1984 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had only two seats in Parliament. In 1999 the number rose to 181. *Ed.*]

Going a step deeper than the conventional field of party politics, the symbol of Hindutva offers a unifying myth that, in spite of its assurances, arouses suspicion among all the other components of Indian society. Paradoxically, the idea of Hindutva derives from the ancient and Western concept of empire and not the traditionally Indic pluralistic attitude. It is fairly well known that "Hinduism" is a foreign term indicating the agglomeration of religions that are (more or less artificially) grouped under the name. It is also a fact that, for many reasons, most of "Hindū India" is gradually slipping away from its traditional roots. A cry of alarm has been raised—and taken full advantage of for immediate political purposes, targeting primarily Muslims and, more recently, Christians. The repercussions were considerable, and the very name of Pakistan antagonized many.

I will not linger further on this present-day political situation, except to make one last observation. Whether the threat comes from Islām, Christianity, foreigners, or the secularized political parties, or whether it is artificially forged, is open to debate.²⁷³ One thing, however, emerges as untouchable: the technocratic system. The modern mentality that advocates a "scientific outlook" in life is not contested.²⁷⁴

This is a formidable task for intellectuals—or better, for active philosophy. Indological studies, contemporary Islamic reflections, Christian theology, and modern philosophy (to name a few somewhat academic examples) must be more than museum pieces, anachronistic souvenirs, or ivory-tower theories, and contemporary intellectual activity must be more than the alienation of the spirit and an alibi for doing nothing. If this is to be so, all the apparently theoretical speculations on the nature of time, space, human relations, matter, and the Ultimate, the wholistic approach to reality, and so on, must have a direct impact on the practical transformation of Man, society, political structures, and so on, thus disturbing the normally comfortable seats of learning, research, and the like.²⁷⁵ In other words, if traditional Indic cultures cannot offer a pattern into which the insights of other cultures may be woven, we might as well declare it a failure and not waste our time in futile elucubrations. Let us respectfully lay aside the Coomaraswamys, Aurobindos, and Kanes of our time and add them to the ranks of our venerated ancestors, the Śankaras, Abhinavaguptas, Rāmānujas, Kautilyas, and the wise Dravidian peoples—as well as the galaxy of poets and mystics.

Overcoming Narcissism

The *second*, and basic, step is to overcome any narcissistic complex, to become aware of our many limitations and shortcomings and with a critical eye carefully examine both the past and all things Indian. Glorification of the past has often been used as a way to hide our cowardice and impotency in the face of our culture's degeneration. It is true that Indic culture has had an influence on the whole of South Asia. It is also true, however, that the "Golden Age" (if it was indeed such) has been succeeded by decay on almost all levels. Without this examination of conscience and a realistic criticism of the past we cannot be open to the

²⁷³ See among others, Goel (1983); Ramswarup & Goel (1982) for a belligerent defense of Hindutva ideology before the name became politically popular.

²⁷⁴ When corresponding with an intellectual Hindū militant, I was commenting somewhat critically about the Indian aping of Western models, to which my dear friend replied that he did not see such a threat—rather, he added, the true danger at that time was the imminent visit of the pope.

²⁷⁵ See Panikkar (1971/3; 1978/5), where, in a more academic tone, I described the three stages of Indological studies and suggested that the current (third) one consists precisely in offering avenues for a radical restructuring of society. If "space" and "time" are also *kāśa* and *kāla*, we cannot leave it to scientific concepts to shape our spatial and temporal existence—briefly put.

alternatives I have proposed. While the narcissistic character of the Indic *psyché* has been noted several times,²⁷⁶ this is only a psychological trait.²⁷⁷ The epistemological counterpart is the lack of a critical mind. Oversimplifying, we could say that the Indian mind is not lacking in insight, reflection, and depth. It does not lack discernment (*viveka*). What it lacks is the ability to double-check its insights with the filter of skepticism; this is the Platonic "knowing how to discern,"²⁷⁸ to submit things we know to criticism. Culturally speaking, the Sanskrit *pramāṇa*, or means of valid knowledge, are *homomorphic equivalents*²⁷⁹ of the *kritiké techné*. Rather than *ars iudicandi*, however, they are *ars inventendi*, ways of reaching truth, not of criticizing it—as, for example, in the case of Anaxagoras.²⁸⁰

Narcissism, as we know, is closely associated with an inferiority complex: "I am satisfied with myself and turn inward because I do not dare to expose myself to the criticism of others."

We must recognize the obvious fact that today's Indic cultures do not possess the same vitality and power they once had. We should also be aware that keeping to ourselves and criticizing others is often a symptom of weakness and lack of self-confidence. It may be a political stratagem to accuse Pakistan, with or without sufficient reason, to blame Indian Muslims for many of the ills whose causes are, in fact, far more complex, or to shift this blame uncritically onto the British Rāj, but the fact that such political maneuvers have the power to sway the masses could suggest that these are subjects that strike a chord with the Indic *psyché*.

Psychohistory is a relatively new discipline. It is right that we take advantage of its insights, which can help to shed some light on these complex problems, but our main concern is not a psychological interpretation of India. We must be careful to avoid every kind of oversimplification.

At the same time, however, in considering the incompatibility between India and modernity we must take into account that there are significant differences between the Indic *psyché* and that of the average Westerner. Only then will we be ready to take the *third* step.

Symbiosis

This applies to Muslim India, Christian India, and most other traditions of the subcontinent. Traditional religions, with the rare but significant exceptions of certain individuals, have all been plunged into crisis due to modernity. Their authority is not sufficiently convincing. The common people look to traditional religions for spiritual solace, peace of mind, or eternal salvation, but to receive inspiration for their everyday lives they generally have to look elsewhere. New wine cannot be poured into old wineskins. The impact of secularism, which is different from secularization and should not be identified with desacralization, cannot be ignored and demands a positive response. It is not necessary to subscribe to the ideas of Karl Marx or Auguste Comte but we have to realize that unless traditional cultures and religions accept the present challenges there is not much hope for what I am proposing, which is *symbiosis* with modernity.

This third step is not in direct contradiction to our main argument. As I pointed out earlier, reality does not need to be dialectical (while being aware, at the same time, that since as far back as Plato and Aristotle the meaning of "dialectics" has never been univocal).

²⁷⁶ "If the Occidental conscience is a product of fear, the Hindū conscience is a product of pride" (Kakar [1966], p. 6).

²⁷⁷ See Akhilananda (1946).

²⁷⁸ Plato, *Polit.* 259e.

²⁷⁹ See Panikkar, *L'incontro indispensabile: dialogo delle religioni* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2001), p. 53n3.

²⁸⁰ Anaxagoras, *Fragm.* 43.

In spite of my sharp criticism of and disagreement with technocracy, I cannot deny two facts. First of all, that it exists and has already become deeply rooted in the country as well as in the world. Second, that it is not all wrong. In fact, it is perhaps due to the failures or weaknesses of other cultures that technocracy has today taken the upper hand, and has de facto brought great benefits to a large group of people, partial and fleeting as these benefits may be. There is no point either in making a straw man of modernity or in covering up the weaknesses of traditional cultures and religions. What I am criticizing here is the narcissistic reaction of dealing with guilt (and responsibility) by devising a scapegoat.

All our criticism of modernity, however, does not allow us to avoid facing difficult questions. Can we live in a nonscientific space? Are we prepared to dwell in non-Cartesian houses? Can we eat without agribusiness? Are we able to think without giving priority to differences or follow "models"? Have we learned to be creative without organized labor? Are we able to live not in linear time but in qualitative time, without hankering for a linear future? Can we be happy and have fulfilled lives living in smaller human units? Are we capable of diverting human ingenuity and inventiveness from objective science to the cultivation of ourselves and the discovery of the spiritual world? Can stimulus and innovation exist without competition? Do we agree with the answer of Apollonius of Tyana (to quote just one of innumerable similar Indic texts) to Vardanes, the Babylonian king: "Superfluity distresses wise men more than deficiency distresses you"?²⁸¹

These and many other questions must be answered if the alternatives I am envisaging are to be incorporated into the *sangam* (confluence) of Indic society. And yet, it is not possible to provide satisfactory answers if we cannot first try out these alternatives. Likewise, essays will be allowed if they are considered to be detrimental to the System. This is the *vital circle* of any realistic attempt at alternatives. A true alternative does not represent the immediate destruction of the technological complex. It is not by waging war against the enemy that peace is obtained. It is not by eliminating the "other," as if "we" were totally right and the "other" absolutely wrong, that a more just human life can be achieved. A true alternative represents a more mature and complete awareness of the many aspects of reality—discovering the *alter* and not forging an *aliud*.

The wrong interpretation of dialectics may be dangerous here. This much we should have learned from history's many revolutions, including that of Marxism. The alternatives are in opposition but not in contradiction to the present system, and they commune on a deeper level of reality, where what I would call mystical insight is found.

Let me explain this in another way. The transformation of society, along with the metamorphosis of human consciousness, must be undertaken by small groups that, however, should not completely exclude the opposite faction. While compromise clearly has its faults, there is something worse about exclusivism and uncompromising stances. The interlude of technology may be, and de facto is, an intermediary moment of preparation for something new. I spoke earlier of *inversion* and self-critical confidence geared to innovation. Let me now add to these *sybiosis*.

The Indic subcontinent could be this crucible (to use another metaphor), as long as the spiritual and/or cultural temperature is high enough. The stimulus and critique from the outside would thus help us to improve, grow, and change our ways of living, thinking, and so on, though not by flatly denying the traditional cultures (of the country) and substituting them with all that is exogenous. Alternative is not substitution. The dream of an earthly paradise may be the quickest way to hell.

²⁸¹ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* I.33. Incidentally, Apollonius was on his way to India.

It may be argued that what has happened until now is the general pattern of history. The Āryans imposed their own ways of living and thinking on the indigenous populations of the country, and from the resulting clashes something new emerged. The Muslims did something similar, the British did also, and the Western civilization is currently doing the same thing through the ruling classes of contemporary Indic society.

There are, however, two differences. The first difference is that today it is done in the name of the same people and by the rulers of the same nation. The Indian Constitution could be a paramount example of the liberal Anglo-Saxon and even somewhat "Protestantish" ideology prevailing in the last century, with touches of indigenization and also foreign socialization. The second difference is that, at least in theory, the government is not (abuse and corruption notwithstanding) imposing its own model for its own benefit. It is, or is said to be, the government of the people and by the people. What in the past the British considered as the protection of their Manchesters and Lancasters today risks being regarded by the officials in power as the protection of their caste, class, or industrial and economic groups (or their purses), with the same consequences and estrangement.²⁸² Despite the high sense of morality of many Indians, however, there is no denying that they are today all in the same boat, and that in the long run we are defeating our own purpose if we only defend one particular class. This means, in other words, that more than merely favoring the victors, the colonizers, and the rich, we are introducing an anonymous and faceless model in the name of world culture and universal values. The elites today are not the masters that the Āryans and Muslims and, to a certain degree, the British were. They are instruments of a supranational ideology called modernity and go by impressive names such as world democracy, world market, human equality, the United Nations, and so on.

I commented earlier on the accusation that this is all just a utopian dream. It is indeed utopia, but that seen through the lens of modernity. Our problem is not strictly political or sociological; it is anthropological and metaphysical. A merely rationalistic idea of Man and a dualistic conception of reality have little hope of being realized, or even comprehended.

Time and again I have hinted that our problem is of cosmic proportions—which obviously only makes sense if Man is more than an evolved monkey and reality more than what meets the eye. This is the change of myth we referred to earlier. Now, myths cannot be manipulated at will; the destiny of the human race is something that transcends all willpower. Religion alone cannot help us, but without the awareness of the third dimension of reality there is no hope. This leads us to the *fourth* step.

Inadequacy

This step consists in realizing the *inadequacy* of both the traditional Indic patterns and the modern Western models. The *innovation* we propose is more than renovation, restoration (or imitation). It may be daunting or utopian to demand newness, but we need the courage of genuine thought. Previously I used the word "mutation"; now I am speaking of newness. I have often talked about mutual fecundation between cultures and religions, because the modern predicament shows us that no single human construct today is self-sufficient enough to effectively solve the problem of the human situation.

All cultural alternatives need an element of newness, which implies rupture, continuation, and fecundation all in one. We might find it impossible to even imagine how things

²⁸² There is a feeling among many officials and politicians today that money given to the poor is lost, it goes down the drain, while financial help for the "upcoming" middle class pays back. I would tend to agree with this cruel and sarcastic remark, but conclude that this proves precisely that the change must be far more radical; it must be a change of structures, not of the allocation of funds.

may be, and experience an anxiety similar to that of young parents expecting their first child after the mother has suffered a great trauma.

What we need is *intellectual courage*—a two-word term that refers, respectively, to the power of the mind and the value of the heart. In other words, we need to overcome both the theory/praxis dichotomy and that of knowledge and love (*jñāna* and *bhakti*). We are far from an efficient praxis when our intellect has not thought out the theory. Likewise, we are incapable of forging a valid theory when our praxis has not furnished the ground for it. While I am not necessarily saying that intellectuals should become guerrilla activists, I believe there should be a much closer bond and symbiosis between action and contemplation, two commonly used terms which may be qualified by saying that the counterpart of praxis is theory (*theoreia*), while contemplation is the synthesis of the two—the action that flows immediately from the vision (*theoreia*) and the vision that is present in the action.

I have called this fourth step the awareness of our *inadequacy* or, to use a more philosophical term, our *contingency*. It refers to the inadequacy of the tradition and of the present, as we have indicated, but also to our own individual and collective inadequacy. Paradoxically (at least to the rational mind), only a true conviction of this double inadequacy can liberate the creative forces to produce the innovation needed. Only a *new innocence* has creative power. There is no such thing as perfect order.

We are not offering a panacea. The alternatives are always imperfect and provisional. But we are fulfilling our human vocation when we strive to use our thinking powers in an effort to come closer to a constantly asymptotic solution.

It is as impossible to reverse the cultural trends without political support as it is to dream of cultural transformation without political conversion. Both belong together—and here we have again the *vital circle*. We shall look at this more closely in the next section.

The Political Tryst

India and Pakistan became two politically independent states half a century ago. In the words of one of the heroes of Independence, voicing the unarticulated aspirations of millions, this event was a momentous act of transcendent significance for the whole world.²⁸³

It is true that if we take into account the history of South Asia through the centuries, the independence of the subcontinent in 1947, after the trauma of the Second World War, represents something more than two new seats at the United Nations and some new stationery in international political circles.²⁸⁴ It was meant to be a "tryst" with history and not just a continuation of the relatively modern "nation-state" ideology.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ It is significant that Pandit Nehru used the rather Scottish and almost obsolete word "tryst" to stress the importance of that night of August 15, 1947. And if it is true that he was too overwhelmed to deliver a prepared speech, the symbolism of the unconscious is more telling still: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time has come when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially." For a vivid account of the facts, see Collins & Lapierre (1980), p. 251. Nehru's acute sense of history, moreover, prompted him to add on that historical occasion, "At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest and trackless centuries are filled with her striving. . . . Through good and ill fortunes alike, she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideal which gave her strength. . . . India discovers herself again."

²⁸⁴ We should not play down the significance of Pakistan either, which was given the unique opportunity to understand in a new light the relationship between religion and politics within the Islamic tradition. If, on one hand, Pakistan or Bangladesh have failed to establish a truly sacred order, on the other hand India cannot be said to have succeeded in installing a genuine secular *res publica*.

²⁸⁵ Toward the end of his life, Pandit Nehru admitted that he had lived "in an artificial world of

The independence of the subcontinent was both an auspicious (in that it was an event of historical significance) and an unsatisfactory *muhūrta* (a special moment in time).²⁸⁶ Suffice it to say that something happened in the world when the representatives of an ancient culture asserted themselves as independent continuators of a human project that claimed to be not merely the overthrowing of a foreign burden but the heralding of a new era. It was South Asia at the crossroads between autochthonous forms of wisdom—the Hindū insight of *dharma* together with the Jaina utter respect for life, the Buddhist boundless compassion, the Parsi uncompromising choosing of good, the Muslim dedication to God, the Sikh straightforwardness for truth, and the Christian ideal of love, along with the secular pursuit of justice, and the tribal communion with nature with so many other values that have been cultivated over thousands of years. This was a veritable “tryst with destiny”—the destiny of one of the oldest and richest human experiences facing the possibility of a new human project as it encounters modernity, taking up the reigns of freedom in order to steer its own course. A promising *kairos* indeed. Yet an unpromising *muhūrta* at the same time, as it seems we precipitated the moment, carried away by the enthusiasm of the circumstances and the unstoppable chain of events, without being prepared to seize the extraordinary possibilities presented by the occasion. Consequently, the new countries were forced to concentrate on solving the many immediate problems that arose at all levels. I refer not only to the well-known irritants of the time (the oppressed outcastes, Hindū-Muslim conflicts, communalism, and poverty) but also to the sense of disorientation created by the immaturity that kept the subcontinent from embarking on a new path in the history of mankind and limited it to merely increasing the number of nation-states.

Was India prepared for the task? Was it all a dream or a nightmare; wishful thinking, pie-in-the-sky or the courageous vision of renewed humanity? Or might it be, perhaps, a covert *svapna* (dream) that South Asia must go through so it can awake once Indra's ordeal is over?²⁸⁷

Since we are seeking alternatives, I might add that the Indic experience can still become such a momentous tryst with the destiny of the human race. Certainly, the events that followed do not seem to corroborate this, and we may need to have patience—the strongest of all virtues. The last fifty years might be considered as just a necessary “running in” (*en rodage*) period before the dawning of a new self-identity, in one of the greatest adventures of the human spirit. There have been similar examples in human history. Hellenic culture was politically defeated. Its “revenge” was to impregnate the civilization of the conquerors up to the present generations in the West. What is at stake here is a similar venture: the almost four thousand years of human civilization in this part of the world. We should bear in mind that these millennia represent not Hindū India alone, but the mosaic of cultures and religions that have lived in syncretic harmony and tensions, war and peace, in the southern part of this geographical and historical continent.²⁸⁸ Like sophists, educated slaves and the vast amount of Hellenic literature that spread throughout the Roman world, today Indian gurus, learned

our own creation” (see R. Gandhi [1984], p. 323).

²⁸⁶ *Muhūrta*, a moment in time, which some consider to be a thirtieth part of the day, which is (for the “devotees” of chronological time) the equivalent of forty-eight minutes.

²⁸⁷ See *MandU 4*.

²⁸⁸ To give a random introduction of the width and depth of the Indic civilization in the Asian and African world I would cite the names of Nag (1941), Harrison (1957) and B. N. Nair (1974; 1975). The influence of so-called Hinduism in many parts of the world is a known although relatively little studied fact. The Hindū-Muslim syncretism is another important fact. Eight hundred years of Muslim influence have made a lasting impact on the culture, and so has Christianity.

professors, and a great deal of Indic literature are spreading throughout the Western world. However, there is an important and frequently overlooked difference.

If the oriental impact on the West is great, the occidental influence on the East is exceedingly greater—with the significant factor that this influence is taken for granted. The West is still conquering the East. One glaring example is that of Tibetan Buddhism, which suffocates in its own country while spreading throughout the world.

In conclusion, it is only if we are willing to do more than pay lip service to the Indic civilizations that the independence of the populations of the Indic continent can be considered a turning point in the future of humankind. This could represent the necessary mutation for the survival of the human race, the recognition that a mere continuation and imitation of the Western culture since the beginning of the so-called Modern Age can no longer be justified.²⁸⁹ The Western Modern Age might have been a good paradigm for making a particular civilization powerful and even glorious. It has certainly been a momentous period in the history of the human spirit. It cannot, however, be a paradigm for the whole world, because if human life were standardized across the planet it would mean the impoverishment of our rich human experience. Besides, there are simply not enough resources for this. The stakes are high. The technocratic complex we are discussing here amounts to far more than washing machines or going to the moon. It implies a radically different anthropological notion: that of Man as independent not only from the Divine, but also from Nature. Technoscientific Man needs neither the protection of Gods nor friendship with the Earth. He considers himself independent and supreme, capable of breaking the rhythms of Nature, taming the Will of the Gods and building not just a Tower of Babel, but a Fourth World—independent from and superior to the First World of the Sacred, the Second World of the Humans, and the Third World of Nature. Techno-scientific Man is a Faustian creature that defies the *triloka* (three worlds) of historical and natural Man. This is a fascinating but Luciferian project.

These introductory words are to an extent necessary in order to determine where this reflection has its place between immediate political concerns and historical anthropological perspectives. We are dealing neither with “party politics” nor with the “evolution of Man,” neither “*politique à la petite semaine*” nor “*le phénomène humain*.” We are interpreting the Indic phenomenon as a realistic challenge to the last five hundred years of world history, during which the Christian *Imperium* collapsed and was substituted by the nation-states.²⁹⁰ I shall come back to this later.

No cultural alternatives can be achieved if we do not envisage equally radical political ones. Politics is perhaps the foremost manifestation of the culture of the people: the art and science of living together in a *polis*.

The first thing to note here is the gap between theory and praxis, between the theoretical utopias of academics and the practical framework in which politicians move. There is nothing new about defending, in the context of political science, the need to overcome the

²⁸⁹ See N. Berdiaev's insightful dream, written in 1924, of a New Middle Ages—which he considers to be the vocation of the peoples of Russia.

²⁹⁰ With great perception, Collins & Lapierre (1980), p. 252, describe the night of the independence of India as the breaking through of a new age: “That age had begun on a soft summer day in a little Spanish port in 1492 when Christopher Columbus sailed off across the endless green seas to the edge of the world in search of India and found America by mistake. Four and a half centuries of human history bore the *imprimatur* of that discovery and its consequences.” My point is to ask whether this is bound to become just rhetoric or historical ontology.

ideology of the nation-state, and even more so that of the sovereign states.²⁹¹ Many studies show the inadequacy of the relationship between an economico-techno-science, which transcends national boundaries, and the still sacrosanct character of frontiers.²⁹² There is no need to elaborate on this. Praxis, on the other hand, is rather difficult to change. The entire status quo of world politics, in spite of blocs and superpowers, veto rights and democratic façades, is still arranged around supreme and sovereign nation-states. The best arrived at are international organizations that are supported by the nations as long as the former support the interests of the latter.²⁹³ Truly supranational institutions are unlikely to be of a strictly political nature.²⁹⁴ There are, however, economic, cultural, and religious supranational institutions like multinationals, universities (theoretically), and churches. The role of these three types of institutions in overcoming the nation-state status quo is a tantalizing subject that we can only mention here.

This brings us to recall the one supranational institution that gave birth and meaning to the nation-states in a Europe that was the cradle of modern science and technology: Christendom, the *Sacrum Imperium Romanum Germanicum*.²⁹⁵ It was not, in fact, the church as it is understood today, nor even Christianity as a religion, but the sacralized ideal of the Roman Empire exercising its *plenitudo potestatis* as the “successor” of Christ.²⁹⁶

Let us attempt to give an account of the independence of India from this perspective.

In spite of the shock and cruel awakening of the First and Second World Wars—which showed the world that the West was not “divine,” that is, the *Sacrum Imperium*—most of the

²⁹¹ See Nandy (1988; 1989).

²⁹² It was clear that the UN Ecological Conference of Rio de Janeiro (1992) was bound to produce unsatisfactory results just from its inadequate methodological approach—that is, the presenting of the sovereign nation-states and the economic factor as nonnegotiable premises.

²⁹³ In spite of a few objective criticisms, the recent withdrawal of the United States and later Britain (reincorporated in 1997) from UNESCO clearly demonstrates this, as does the benign disregard of nation-states with regard to resolutions by the United Nations or the International Court of Justice at the Hague when such are not in the interests of the respective states, for example, the former South Africa government, Israel, the United States, and the former USSR. Another good example is the delay on the part of the states in paying their annual economical contributions to UN programs.

²⁹⁴ The writer, as one of the judges of the Permanent People's Tribunal (for the Liberation of Peoples), which acquired juridical status after the so-called Russell Tribunal, has witnessed the freedom and impotency of its deliberations. The Nüremberg Tribunal against war crimes was a tribunal of the victors. This people's tribunal does not have “political” power because, since it is not international but supranational and, consequently, the nation-states having no control over it, they cannot agree on recognizing a higher instance than that of the respective states. Modern states are only willing to yield some of their rights for the sake of the demands of other states on the basis of the model of individual liberties, which are only limited by the liberties of others without the need to recognize any other qualitatively superior code. Morality has been reduced to a private affair—of individuals or states. The Gulf War, the NATO war against ex-Yugoslavia, the emerging New Europe, the Pinochet case, etc., are all examples of this.

²⁹⁵ See as token literature, Dawson (1953), especially the chapter “Church and State”; Dempf (1929), etc.

²⁹⁶ “Christ left to Peter not only the universal Church, but the whole world to govern,” said Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) (Migne, LP 114.759 [*apud* Dawson (1953), p. 86]). “The King, like the priest, was an officer in the one Christian society” (*ibid.*). Jordan of Osnabruck went as far as affirming “that as the Roman Church is the Church of God so the Roman Empire is the kingdom of God” (*apud* Dawson [1953], p. 93). For the famous comparison of the sun (pope) and the moon (king), and the famous bull *Unam sanctam* of Boniface VIII (1302) regarding the two swords, the spiritual and temporal, see *Denz.*, 870–75.

intelligentsia of the colonies, and certainly the leading personalities of India, were imbued with the idea of European, especially British, superiority, not perhaps from the point of view of race and metaphysical acumen, but certainly of civilizational values. There were exceptions, but they were limited mainly to previous generations or poets.²⁹⁷ The political climate, however, was different.²⁹⁸ It was considered politically incorrect to reform and modernize the pre-Independence Indian nations. The Pandit Nehru's generation did not for a moment doubt that India should be a state at least to the same extent that Great Britain had been. What the elites of that generation never understood was that India was not a state in the Western sense of the word; they never realized that the idea of state in which they so reverently believed is actually a theological and Christian concept.²⁹⁹ The European nation-states, in fact, were all born as fragmentations of the empire of Christendom, the Christian successor to the Roman Empire. This is the reason why Europe, seen with historical eyes, appears as a consistent unity.³⁰⁰

The Christian Empire was an ideology; it had a common purpose, an underlying and unifying myth and took a particular political form.³⁰¹ It represented a complete way of life embracing all aspects of humans living both in this world and the hereafter. It was not always a rigid theocratic imperialistic system. Dante's *De monarchia*, for example, attempted to combine the wholistic approach with the new insights of the incipient Renaissance in a sort of dialectical communion with the papacy.

Charles V was the last factual emperor of Christendom. From then on, the vast majority of European countries, beginning with France, gradually began to establish themselves as independent nation-states.³⁰² They fought against each other and the papacy, but they were all united by a strong religious-cultural link.³⁰³ Not only were they decidedly Christian but

²⁹⁷ We find great wisdom in Rabindranath Tagore's *Lectures and Addresses* dating back to the beginning of the century: "We feel the withering fierceness of the spirit of modern civilization all the more because it beats directly against our human sensibility; and it is we the Eastern hemisphere who have the right to say that those who represent this great age of opportunities are furiously building their doom by their renouncement of the divine ideal of personality; for the ultimate truth in Man is not in the intellect or in the material wealth; it is in his illumination of sympathy, in his illumination of heart, in his activities of self-sacrifice, in his capacity for extending love far and wide across all barriers of caste and colour, in his realizing this world not as a storehouse of mechanical power but as a habitation of man's soul with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of a divine presence" (1980), pp. 75–76 (from a lecture delivered in Ahmedabad in 1920).

²⁹⁸ In his lecture "Nationalism in India," Tagore is boldly prophetic: "Nationalism is a great menace. It is this particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude, we have tried to develop within ourselves, despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual political destiny" (1980), p. 108. This once famous but now long forgotten speech began with the words, "Our real problem in India is not political. It is social" (*ibid.*, 101).

²⁹⁹ See, just for background, Heer (1953; 1964).

³⁰⁰ India, writes Tagore, "is many countries packed into one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely, one country made into many." He goes on to say in the same famous speech, delivered in the United States, that India, which is "naturally many, yet adventitiously one, has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity" (see Tagore [1980], p. 109).

³⁰¹ See Panikkar (1961/IV), despite its obsolete vocabulary.

³⁰² After Charles V, the Empire was officially fragmented. Phillip II was recognized king of Spain with more power than Emperor Maximilian.

³⁰³ Until well into the eighteenth century, practically all peace treaties began: "In nomine sanctae et indivisae trinitatis."

they all (at least up to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870) conserved the Christian myth as their unifying force. Even today, in fact, the term "post-Christian" Europe refers precisely to this: post-Christian, meaning that it is only understandable in relation to Christian values, reflections, and reactions.³⁰⁴ Beyond and behind (if not also above) all the constitutions of modern Europe looms a sort of "Christianness." Spain and Portugal were not the only countries that justified their colonial domination theologically; in more subtle ways, in fact, the expansion of the rest of the European nations was also dictated by the same mentality.³⁰⁵ They shared an unwritten code, a set of common assumptions that were modified through the ages while conserving the same underlying myth. Even now, instead of one pope, one church, one king, or one empire we have one science, one technology, one democracy, one world market, and the ideal of a one-world government. It is the same monotheistic archetype. Whereas in the past the doctrine was "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*," today it has become "*extra scientiam nulla salus*" ("outside [modern] science there is no salvation").

The modern nations were independent and even sovereign parts of an empire long after emperors and popes had lost their privileges. There remained a link, a community of ideals, a common language, a set of shared values, the bond of a common history, a transcendent destiny. The traditional idea of sovereign governments, for instance, was far removed from the modern idea of total freedom within the state. A king would be judged by God and his peers, when not by the supreme pontiff. All nation-states and their governments recognized that they were ruled by a transcendent moral law, a secularized Christian code of beliefs and conduct that was greatly superior to any sovereign democratic constitution.³⁰⁶ It took the flagrant crimes of the Nazis to awaken the latent Christendom that gave birth to the Nuremberg tribunal for crimes against humanity. Similar crimes had been committed in previous history, but the idea of such a tribunal did not occur until this time. The European Union is a final secularized effort at regaining unity. Myths are stronger and last longer than their logos-contents.

The ritual by which India was declared independent was not a declaration of independence *to* (that is, to do what it wanted, to reestablish a [lost] link with its past, etc.), but of independence *from* (from the tutelage of a senior nation-state, on the grounds that it had now learned to govern itself). Its underlying values and presuppositions, the model on which it was based, remained that of being *also* a nation-state; imitating centuries of European history, it joined the club of (Christian) nations without ever having been part of the Christian ideology. Even today the "British" Commonwealth is a faded replica of the Christian Empire.

What I am driving at is this. The very idea of nation-state, which is today facing its own endogenous crisis, is foreign to India and Indic self-identity.³⁰⁷

One example will serve here to express a whole theory: the meaning of history. From Augustinus to Hegel, Karl Löwith, and Jean Daniélou, and including such diverse thinkers as Marx and Toynbee, Western philosophy has been characterized by a preoccupation with

³⁰⁴ See Karl Jaspers's statement that "all we Westerners are Christian"—though not in the strict or narrow confessional sense, of course (Jaspers [1963], pp. 2, 52).

³⁰⁵ The emperor of India and king or queen of Great Britain are at the same time the supreme Heads of the Christian (Anglican) Church. *Defensor fidei* is a common title of some European monarchies.

³⁰⁶ We only have to analyze what today is known as the "oath of office" to recognize the remnants of the Christian ritual of investiture.

³⁰⁷ See Nandy (1988), showing how the idea of the primacy of the state (and culture is only justified inasmuch as it fosters the state) began in the middle of the nineteenth century as a form of Hindū self-defense: "These votaries of a Hindū nation-state, thinking that they were pleading for a Hindū polity, were also mostly unaware that the nation-state system was one of the more recent innovations in human civilization" (p. 5).

history (rooted in Herodotus, Polybius, and the like) that is peculiar to the Semitic civilizations: there is a universal history, it has a meaning, and the sense of "chosenness" is inherent in almost all Western nations.³⁰⁸ History is an Abrahamic category.³⁰⁹ Hegel and Marx are part of this. History is the field of divine human revelation. A nation-state has a mission to fulfill on earth, and it is destined to become powerful and secure precisely for the purpose of carrying out its sacrosanct duty. No sacrifice for the state is too small. A latent messianism is present everywhere, even without necessarily aggressive or militaristic undertones. Certainly, the concept of state is evolving. The idea of the United States as a nation began with the sense of a biblical vocation. Practically all the inaugural speeches of the president of the USA stress this idea. The desire of the "Founding Fathers" to establish a New Israel slowly evolved into the idea of a sort of gigantic corporation. The president is the first salesman for the prosperity of the country.³¹⁰ Economy is paramount.³¹¹ What gives consistency to a modern state is the inertia of the past and the corporate task of economic welfare. "We are heading toward the future, building a better future"—economically, of course, and for this the whole nation must be put to work. Thus labor is both a primary duty and a right, and the state is converted into an economic unit.

All this may be overstated, one-sided, and ambivalent, but it is, nevertheless, light years away from the traditional conception of the East. And this is the Western model that India adopted, in spite of, and perhaps partly because of, its dream of realizing *Rāma Rājya* (Rāma's Kingdom).

India gained her independence either too early, causing the partition between Hindustan and Pakistan, or too late, missing the ripe historical moment of the Bengali renaissance of the last century. In actual fact, Gandhiji did not originally press for independence; he came to the conclusion that independence had to precede the separation of Hindustan and Pakistan mainly because his views on the separation differed from those of Jinnah.³¹² Sri Aurobindo also withdrew from so-called politics. Rabindranath Tagore was extremely critical of the

³⁰⁸ It is not only "Deutschland über alles"; it is also "The most beautiful country of the world," "Todo por la patria," "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori," "La France éternelle," "Britannia rules the waves," "Right or Wrong, my Country," "AEIOU" (Austria Erit In Orbe Ultima), "ius divinum nationum," "Israel the Chosen People," and so on.

³⁰⁹ See, for one example, Daniélou (1953).

³¹⁰ Speaking on television, President Nixon told the nation that he was going to China "as your salesman." Reagan also said something similar. The American corporation is in urgent need of expanding its markets (with a \$400 billion deficit in 1987).

³¹¹ The facts are now commonplace. When in 1993 John Major (Great Britain), Felipe González (Spain), and Helmut Kohl (Germany) came on official visits to India, besides some ritual fanfare they came to talk *business*—and, in fact, their retinue consisted mainly of executives from the business world.

³¹² "The Pakistan of the C.R. [Rajagopalachari]; Gandhi's conception was to come after independence—'as soon as possible after India is free' the Mahatma had said to Jinnah—whereas Jinnah wanted Pakistan before the British left and under British auspices. He did not trust a Congress-ruled India to implement a Pakistan promise. . . . As for total sovereignty, Gandhi said that he and Rajaji both conceded the Muslims' right for a separate state 'without the slightest reservation,' but if this meant utterly independent sovereignty, so that there is nothing in common between the two, 'I hold it is an impossible proposition. . . .' Jinnah saw two nations, one Muslim and the other Hindū, and wanted a political recognition of their unbridgeable difference. The Mahatma was prepared to see separation among children of the same family, but to him India was still one family. And it was this different outlook, rather than an intention to deceive, that shaped Gandhi's conviction that independence had to precede separation. Indians, and not the power ruling them, would decide whether they stayed together or separated" (see R. Gandhi [1984], p. 103).

pre-Independence trends of India.³¹³ Vinoba Bhave did not want to have anything to do with the government and advocated a change in its very structure. Jayaprakash Narayan was committed to total revolution. Most of these were for decentralization, a return to nature, and the “modernization” of the Indic culture—which, however, certainly did not mean replacing the Indic cultures with an alien type of civilization. The modern trends of many Indian regions today, in fact, point (albeit timidly, since it is “blasphemous” to even doubt the “sacred unity of India”) toward a much more relaxed confederation and even secessionist orientations.³¹⁴ It should be clear to us by now how far we have come from the dream of a unified India that is both fully modern in its own way and as fully traditional as her ancient *mythos* demands. The Indian British Empire broke down, but British India was born.

There is no point now in wishful thinking or futile lamentations, but these can be regarded as lessons for the present and inklings of the future.

Here I would like to offer my own interpretation of the current situation, and stand open to correction. I feel it is important that this view be known and discussed. The situation of the world in general and the subcontinent in particular is serious enough that we should be careful not to dismiss lightly what may appear at first sight as a utopian idea.

India is becoming painfully aware that the Indian nation-state project is going to be faced with increasing difficulties. Partition was followed by the Bangladesh question, which was not just an internal problem of Pakistan. Since the beginning of Independence there has been unrest in the northeast, and today there are increasing demonstrations and movements urging greater independence. As soon as India began to see itself as a nation-state it was forced to adopt the European pattern and to repress its own special way of conceiving civilized life—indeed, its own unifying myth. India, or “les Indes,” “las Indias,” as it is still referred to in other European languages, is a mosaic of nations and a bundle of cultures kept together fundamentally by geography and subsidiarily by history. Even at the heart of classical Hinduism, rifts are beginning to (re)appear. In Tamil Nadu the proposed singing of the “Sarasvatī Vandana” has reawakened the ancient challenge to Sanskrit Hinduism and reaffirmed the conviction that Śaivasiddhānta does not belong to Hinduism.³¹⁵ The caste system itself was, at best, an effort at maintaining pluralism. The unity of India belongs to the order of the *mythos*, not of the *logos*. Its 1,652 languages, despite the fact that only around 20 of them are “official,” are proof enough of this.³¹⁶ “National Integration” is doomed

³¹³ As early as 1920 Tagore writes, “But now our passion for power and money has no equal in the field. It has not only science for its ally, but also other forces that have some semblance of religion, such as nation worship and the idealizing of self-interest” (1980, p. 72). He even speaks of the “demoniacal power of the Nation” (1980, p. 128). He was keenly aware of the problems endemic to the Westernization of Indian culture: “Freed from the bond of spiritual relationship as the medium of the brotherhood of man, the different sections of society are being continually resolved into their elemental character of forces. Labor is a force, and also capital; so are the government and the people, the man and the woman. . . . To own the secret of mustering these forces is a proud fact for us, but the power of self-control and self-sacrifice within is a truer subject of exultation for mankind” (1980, pp. 73–74).

³¹⁴ See P. K. Roy (1988), pp. 22ff., and Vidyadharan (1988), pp. 8ff.

³¹⁵ See Ramasvamy (1999), pp. 92–93.

³¹⁶ Without agreeing with the joke that the difference between a language and a dialect is that the former is backed by an army and a (royal) academy, the main distinction is certainly a distinction of power. Every living language is a dialect. Academicians use their own dialect, which many people do not understand.

to failure.³¹⁷ The people cannot flourish and be happy in the strait (or loose) jacket of a foreign worldview.

Modern Hinduism is right in feeling threatened by modernity, whatever we may think about the proposed remedies. India is a plurality of nations, and if we use the classical language it can only be coherent as an empire or, in other words, a common project of living together for the purpose of realizing certain ideals under a unifying myth—which, ultimately, is what all empires have been. From this perspective we can also understand more clearly the idea of a secular state acting as an umbrella to the country's astounding diversity. Equally understandable, however, is the resulting uneasiness of many segments of the population, because either this secularity is no more than a common denomination at the bottom of society (and then the country cannot claim to be a modern state) or it imposes unification from the top (which may be perceived as a threat to the religious self-understanding of many people).

Using a more political language, the only long-term stable solution for the Indian subcontinent would be the formation of a kind of confederation of South Asian nations, in which all countries of the Indic culture could come together in total independence and freedom to follow their own ways. Earlier I spoke of inter-independence. This blanket confederation could include the creation of a sort of common market for practical purposes and a basic common defense for tactical ones. Here I am thinking not only of the North East—Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Panjab, for example, but also of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and other countries. I could expound this conviction by showing how the tendencies of many regions today point in this direction.³¹⁸ Obviously, however, this implies that the Western pattern of civilization, along with its technological temptation, must be overcome.

This last proviso is essential. If the smaller nations simply follow the Western model we shall not be much better off, except for the negligible advantage of having minor units and more homogeneous nations in which new experiences are possible on a human scale. In a country of 1 billion people, however, even if there was only one single language and one single culture, a human experience would not be possible.³¹⁹ A computerized centralized government may be a corporation, but it is not a nation, nor is it even conducive to "national integration."³²⁰

³¹⁷ See Roy Burman (1975), pp. 131–48, which contains a useful bibliography. See especially "Displacement of the Ritual Order by Technological Order," pp. 146–247.

³¹⁸ One example of a positive attempt is SAARC (South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation), which includes the seven countries of the region: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. See Katyal (1986), pp. 4ff., Chakravarty (1986), pp. 10ff., and *The Hindū*, June 24, 1987; April 3, 1988. The association had its ups and downs as it struggled to find genuine cooperation despite the political tension caused by events in the region (see Parthasarathy [1989], pp. 17ff. in Islamabad, and Katyal (1990), pp. 17ff. in Male), where important decisions were taken as "the signing by the seven Foreign Ministers of the SAARC Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances" and on "the establishment of joint ventures in cottage industries and handicrafts for promoting collective self-reliance" (p. 19).

³¹⁹ An example that is not far removed in time and space and is free from political interpretations is the case of Kodagu (Coorg), which after Independence enjoyed a truly democratic administration and prosperous life before it was merged with the larger Karnataka and exploited to the point of losing most of its wealth (see C. M. Ramachandra [1988/1], pp. 89–91; [1988/2]).

³²⁰ The Berlin Wall has fallen, but the United States has put up powerful fences (which, if necessary, can be electrified) along a great part of its Mexican border. And now India has begun erecting a 507-kilometer fence on the border with Bangladesh, costing an estimated Rs 800 crores (see *The Hindū*, March 3, 1993).

Many essays being written today point in this direction, though not quite at what I am proposing. I defend a confederation of nations, not of states in the modern individualistic sense.³²¹ Or, if the word "nation" no longer corresponds to its etymological meaning, we could speak of a confederation of peoples, as the European "council of peoples" still loosely suggests.

Obviously, this would not solve all the problems. The tensions between the peoples of the subcontinent are deeply rooted, and neighboring countries have contrasting interests. The situation is complex, and there are no universal panaceas.

It has been written that "India is a large Switzerland."³²² This is not true. Switzerland is Christian and post-Christian; India is a mosaic of religious traditions. Switzerland has a common myth; India is an entire mythology. The history of Switzerland is centuries old; that of India dates back thousands of years. Switzerland is small; India is large—and here applies the law of qualitative change through quantitative increase. Furthermore, Switzerland has a history within the European community. Switzerland has St. Nicholas of Flüe as an accepted symbol, while Gandhi, "the father of the Nation," is being rejected by the majority of Dalits. Switzerland acquired identity when the Christian empire was dismembered; India has practically never been an "empire" in the sense of a unifying myth. It never became part of the myth of the British Empire, nor did the British Rāj have any wish to interfere with the cultures of India. Whether Switzerland does indeed qualify as a model is, in fact, the debatable question.³²³

Despite all these considerations, however, we must not devalue the many positive initiatives being taken today within the broad framework of the Constitution. One example is the *zilla parishads* (district councils) and the *mandal panchayats* (village assemblies) in Karnataka, which rose again to power in 1987.³²⁴ Existing since 1959, the panchayati Rāj system focuses on decentralization and giving power to the rural people at a grassroots level, but had hitherto remained inactive except in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and West Bengal (where it has been successfully implementing land reforms).³²⁵ In 1989, during the budget session, a constitutional amendment was introduced in the Lok Sabha for reforming the panchayati Rāj, causing some apprehension among the political parties governing the different states, which feared that this law might cause interference with the affairs of the local governments.³²⁶ If

³²¹ A transfer is taking place from European–North American individualism to nation-state individualization. Nation-states are nothing but the collective copy of single individuals, and the democracy of individuals is being (theoretically) reenacted in the democracy of "one nation, one vote." The present setup of the United Nations shows palpably how this is not possible.

³²² See Balasundaram (1968), pp. 9–23.

³²³ Interestingly, Tagore (1980, p. 116) also dismissed this parallelism with Switzerland, which was already popular in his time.

³²⁴ There are two pioneering innovations: 30 percent of the elected members are women, and the voting age has been lowered to eighteen. There are now nineteen empowered Zilla Parishads, with the president of each Parishad ranking as a minister of state, and there are 2,586 Mandal Panchayats. All together, and for the first time, there are 53,000 representatives of the people from the grassroots level (see *The Hindū*, January 26, 1987). This innovation in decentralization has been keenly and regularly reported by the press. See, for example, the *Indian Express* (February 2, 1987); *The Hindū* (February 22, 1987; March 15, 1987; August 2, 1987); and the "Advertisement Supplements" in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (May 3, 1987). See the assessment of Parvathi Menon (1990) after three years of experience.

³²⁵ See Vinayak (1989/1), pp. 23–24; V. K. Rao (1989), pp. 25ff. We know also of the brave attempt of an All Women Panel Contests Panchayat Election in Satara district, Maharashtra (see Pathankar [1984], pp. 2ff.

³²⁶ See Padmanabhan (1989), pp. 17ff.; Chakravarty (1989), pp. 21–22.

organized well and with the right motivation, the active participation of the people should lead to healthy changes.³²⁷

I would be ignoring the complexity of the Indian situation if I proposed the immediate implementation of my more radical suggestions. My purpose, in fact, is merely to present them as the goal we should aim for. The current serious economic recession makes it sufficiently clear that what I am proposing is more realistic than this increasing dependence on a System for all our life's activities.³²⁸

One objection to the implementation of this more Gandhian lifestyle is that "India cannot isolate itself from the rest of the world." This is certainly true—yet here we have an example of the elitist and biased use of language. To be in communion with 80 percent of the world population cannot be called isolation unless one assumes that the only possible information is by telex and satellites. "Isolation" is a euphemism for refusal to join the club of the wrongfully termed "advanced" nations. It is the leaders and governments in power who are actually isolated from the rest of the world.³²⁹

Apart from this, "isolation" is a spatial concept that is applied metaphorically to our human situation with the assumption that we all agree on what real space is, that is, the "scientific" notion of it. In Indic cosmology, however, space is something quite different. Each nation has its own space in which it can breathe, live, and thrive, and outside this space it suffocates. The space of the Indic people is not that of the Europeans, and throwing them into the same box can only produce confusion, disorder, and suffering. I am not convinced that seeing the "world" on a television screen means greater communion than discussing the situation of mankind in a tea shop or *mandapam*. Who is more isolated? I do not wish to take sides, however, but merely to point out that a person who has experienced the *buddha-kāya*, the *dharma-kāya*, the mystical Body of Christ, or even the universal law of *karma* is not necessarily more isolated than a voracious reader of newspapers or a television and Internet addict.³³⁰

In short, the peoples of the world do not inhabit the same spaces and times, just as we do not live in the same bodies—and yet we are able to communicate.³³¹ It is important that

³²⁷ In February 1991, the Left Democratic Front, in Kerala, won a major victory in the newly founded district council elections (see Isaac [1991], pp. 34ff.).

³²⁸ Here it is worth including an anecdote, because its *prima facie* interpretation has been used to prove the backwardness of the villagers. A development agency was trying to install a pipeline for drinking water in one village. The villagers were not satisfied. They wanted simply wells and more effective ways of getting the water from them. They felt that the pipeline would make them dependent on those with the power to turn on and off the water in a distant central station to which they had no control nor did they know how it worked. We could take this water pipeline to represent the industrial, financial, and technocratic pipelines that force bare human existence to depend on a world market, an agribusiness whose decisions are all made at the top. The present world economy is based not on interdependence but on dependence. If the computer breaks down, a "computerized" society collapses.

³²⁹ Not only psychologically and sociologically, but also literally. The atrocious security measures that most politicians, financial, and industrial magnates endure is simply unbelievable and would be unbearable if power were not offering some artificial consolations. The fear of so-called terrorism has reached paranoiac dimensions among those in power, who cannot even freely take a stroll alone.

³³⁰ I used to say ironically that I have Internet (the spiritual connection) but not "externet" (the electronic gadget).

³³¹ A concrete and tragic example of human space versus "scientific" space is the forced displacement of peoples and villages with the excuse of "national needs," whether for a dam, a military base, mining facilities, or other technological reasons, as already mentioned earlier. Modern civilization is totally unaware that the displacement of human beings represents not merely a move within Cartesian space but the mutilation of their bodies and the inner destruction of their lives.

we acknowledge the different kosmologies. On one hand, to be human means to be aware of our responsibility to take this world as a laboratory for making life both more comfortable and more just. On the other hand, to be human also means to participate consciously and responsibly in the "joyous festival of being human"; that is, to share in the joy of the unfolding of the universe.³³² Here religion reconnects ("religates") us to the creative activity of reality (whether we call this God or by any other name) and *dharma* reconnects us to the binding laws of the universe in its endless dance of creativity.

The word "modernity" has an etymological reference to time. We are told we must be "of" our time. This is of course true. Yet time is diachronic; a German urbanite is not a "contemporary" of an Indian peasant since they do not truly live in the same time. "Scientific" time has led the Westernized elites of the world to believe that time is a homogeneous parameter. Gradually, however, we are beginning to recognize the diachronical nature of both modernity and contemporaneity.

If India were to follow its own original, distinct path it would do everything but isolate itself. It might be an island (*insula*, isolated), but this island would become a challenge to the world, an irritant and an example, a motive of imitation and of contestation; it would establish an extraordinary polarity despite being evaluated differently by different people. Far from being isolated, in fact, India would truly lead the genuinely nonaligned "third way."

It does not fall within the scope of this study to suggest *how* this could be done, and there are today already a number of studies on such "models." We might, rather, stress the importance of reevaluating the concept of "people" and the reality of "nation" as opposed to that of "state." The alternative to nation-state is not necessarily feudalism; it is more a confederation of nations, similar, perhaps, to the Greek *politeuma* or confederation of cities based not on their individuality (city-states) but on the personality of the citizens and the unity of the bio-regions.

I am not proposing philosopher-kings or dreaming of holy citizens. I am presenting the need for a new vision of the human project based on a new reinterpretation of the past, a fresh interpretation of the present, and a creative step toward a new experience of human existence on earth—and also in heaven (to emphasize the kosmological change). We can no longer isolate the political scene from comprehensive human life and cosmic solidarity. This brings us to the third section of this chapter.

Religious Transformation

Cultural and political alternatives cannot be long-lived if the religious factor is absent. And here the difficulty is no less than in the two previous sections. If modern culture needs to be challenged and the political setup requires change, the religious element also demands a radical transformation. Religion is ingrained in human society and grafted in the deeper layers of the human being. Without religious change we will have only ephemeral revolutions. The castes of India are a significant example. Neither the good intentions of the Constitution nor the technological civilization has succeeded in abolishing them. The roots are religious, and religion is the most subtle and powerful driving force of the human being, both for good and for ill.

Let me say straightaway that the concept of *religion*, which contains, of course, an element of theory as well as praxis, is threefold. The first aspect is *religiousness*, or the human dimension that concerns ultimacy, in whatever we believe this ultimacy to lie.

³³² See Śāntideva, *Bodhi* VII.57.

Religiousness belongs to human nature. Man is a *Homo religiosus*, a being aware of the infinite, the mystery, the unknown, toward which his sentiment is undefined. The second aspect is *religionism* (generally called religion), an ideology that is to varying degrees open or closed, or a system of ultimate beliefs pertaining to a given collectivity. *Religionism*, like Buddhism, "Christianism," and Hinduism, gives Man a sense of belonging. *Religiology* is the third aspect. We are conscious and thinking beings, and we strive to formulate in a more or less perfect and intellectual way the meaning of our existential situation. Religiology is doctrinal. Religionism is social. Religiousness is experiential. These three ought to be distinct from one another, but it is impossible to separate them. Man is neither an isolated individual (satisfied with his religiousness), nor a mere social being (content just with religionism). He is also a rational animal (needing religiology), who articulates ideologically his views on the ultimate nature of reality.

The relationship between these three notions, moreover, is intrinsic and nondualistic: culture gives religion its language, and religion gives culture its ultimate contents. Culture without politics is folklore; politics without culture is impossible, since politics provides the basic framework for culture. Religion without politics is a hypocritical alienating force; politics without religion is no more than a choice of means to uncertain ends. The three belong together.

The role of religion in this search for alternatives is twofold: it gives the individual the ultimate motivation to plunge into the praxis, and offers the ultimate theory of what we all are seeking.

I am well-aware of the alien character and inadequacy of the name "religion." It is neither originally Christian, nor Muslim, nor Hindū, nor even Greek. It is a syncretistic Latin compromise. The word *dharma*, however, also presents me with similar difficulties in making my point.³³³ Notwithstanding, the syncretistic origin of the word itself should help us to extend its use beyond the official religions. Humanism, Marxism, or indeed anything we may believe that gives our own life ultimate meaning can be called religion. Religions do not have the monopoly on religion.

In the Indic subcontinent the different traditional religions have basically coexisted peacefully. They have also, through the centuries, influenced each other considerably and have given birth to new religions. On the whole, however, they have remained separate communities, in keeping with the caste mentality pattern followed by the general Indic mind.³³⁴ We must bear in mind that "Hinduism" is merely a foreign label invented for the purpose of grouping together a bundle of religions (or religious traditions).³³⁵

In keeping with these considerations, this implies not only cultural symbiosis and political change, but also religious transformation. Just as one single political structure cannot harbor a plurality of cultures, so today's religious traditions are unable to adequately handle the present human situation. The remedy is not, as was commonly believed among the intellectuals and epigones of the Enlightenment (especially Marx and followers), to "throw the baby out with the bathwater." It lies in the transformation of religious understanding—which will not necessarily make traditional religions obsolete, but will subject them to more profound change than mere reform.

³³³ See C. Badrinath (1993).

³³⁴ The difference is clear if we compare, for example, the case with which Japanese society merges Shinto rituals with Buddhist allegiance, neo-Confucianist attitudes, and even Christian beliefs and secular practices.

³³⁵ See, for example, King (1999), pp. 146–85.

As most experts on the subject acknowledge, the signs of the times appear to be pointing to a major change in human religious consciousness. And I for one believe that it is a historical imperative of the Indic continent, cradle of so many religious persuasions, to lead the way in the next leap—as a “leap” it will surely be. Today most of the kosmologies of traditional religions are obsolete, and the respective creeds, therefore, are in need of renewal. I am defending a religiously new *ethos* for humankind in which each religion will be seen as a dimension of the other, a varyingly convincing expression of the ultimate meaning of life and the ways conducive to reaching that goal—however it may be conceived. I am thinking of something akin to the Christian trinitarian notion of *perichôrêsis*. We approach a pluralistic confederation of systems of beliefs and ultimately of experiences of reality. Fundamental differences on doctrinal issues will stay. Religions may remain as steadfast as languages, each one expressing a distinct and immutable way of being in the world, rather than just a different way of saying the same thing. Each language reflects a diverse color of the bountiful canvas of human life. And yet translations are possible, communication is not excluded, and even confrontations can be allowed once a common field has been established. This transformation of religious consciousness that I am advocating does not dream of one “world religion,” since humankind would gain nothing from speaking one single language. Reality is multifaceted, polymorphous, pluralistic.

I am not defending a *merely* transcendent unity of religions, because religions are something *more* than transcendent realities.³³⁶ I am not advocating the *purely* mystical union of religions because they are more than a mystical core.³³⁷ I am pursuing a way of *dharma samanvaya*, of harmony of all *dharma*s.³³⁸ Yet harmony is not synonymous with uniformity or lack of contradiction. It belongs to another plane. Nor should we reduce religions to *religiousness*, or be blind to the historical fact that, in all their multivalence and complexity, while they represent the highest human values, religions are also, and often inextricably, exponents of the darkest layers of the human being, both individually and collectively. *Corruptio optimi pessima*, the corruption of the best is the worst. But based on the character of ultimacy that is peculiar to religion we cannot separate these two aspects, categorically proclaiming religion to be the good side of its ambivalent nature. Where there is heaven, there is also hell.

What I am advocating is not the transcendent unity of religions, that is, that all religions are ultimately one, but the *transcendental concurrence* of religions. Each religion, by its very nature, expresses in its own unique way what it considers religion to be (whatever beliefs it may be founded on). If we agree to define “religion” as the set of symbols, ideas and practices that are believed to guide us toward the ultimate meaning of life (whatever this may be), each religion will embody this belief in its own distinctive way. The nature of religion is like the nature of Man. We do not know exactly what Man *is*, and yet each one of us in our own unique, real way represents and fulfills the nature of Man. However, the essence of Man cannot be said to be, for example, based on the WASP model or the brahmin archetype. Each individual is transcendently related to the nature of the *humanum*. This *humanum*, however, like religion, is not an immutable and superior essence that individuals or religions look to as a model. This way of thinking has created havoc in human history. Being black or white, female or male, introverted or extroverted are different ways of being Man, but we cannot say that either of the pair is the model. This is also the case with religions. Likewise,

³³⁶ See Schuon (1948) and the pioneering work since 1932 of Bhagavan Das (1955).

³³⁷ The writings of S. Radhakrishnan have consistently emphasized this point.

³³⁸ This is a reference to *BS I.1.4*, which is applied to all *dharma*s as suggested by S. Radhakrishnan in his translation (1960), p. 249.

just as there are also handicapped persons and human misfits, so there may also be deformations and degenerations of religions.

In short, there is an element of mystery in reality, a dimension of transcendence in Man, an eternal "more" in all that there "is": more than the individual, more than society, more than what meets the eye, more than the present, more than all that can be said and thought. There is a place of freedom that is accessible to all, but because it is pure freedom no description or experience of it is adequate, and all thought, remembrance, perception, or even reenactment is secondary. We must have faith in ourselves, each other, and the Mystery itself. Faith is necessary for human existence.

This is the religious transformation I am envisaging: on one hand, the overcoming of exclusivism, absolutism, and every kind of fanaticism; on the other, a willingness to cooperate whenever a common endeavor arises. This is not new, one may say, and the greatest peoples in human history have always shown this magnanimity, tolerance, and ultimately, intelligence. But today we are more aware of the presence and value of others, and the urgency of our present-day predicament obliges every conscious human being to get their priorities straight. There is a strong awareness that religions, which generally began as factors of reform, newness, even revolution, often tend to arrest the growth of human life, and that, having been one of the causes of the present situation, must now help to remedy it.

The term that is increasingly being used today (though not without understandable, and often healthy, reserve) is *pluralism*, a concept that we might sum up as the human experience of contingency, in the sense that we are *tangents* (*cum tangere*) to the Absolute. Without dwelling here on the nature of this "Absolute," we may say that no human (or religion) is the Absolute or has a monopoly on it. Like the tangent, we are one-dimensional and touch it at one point only.

Coming back to India, and without indulging in an easy critique of institutionalized religiosities, fanatic religionisms, and exclusive religiousness, we may suggest the following.

First of all, it could be easy to assert that all religions have failed. There is no doubt that the lofty teachings of Buddha, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, Krishna, and any other great religious figures all have failed, in the sense that their teachings have all too often been betrayed, when not distorted, by their followers. And yet one of the traits of the human condition is to cope with failure, be it called sin, *avidyā*, unbelief, or whatever. We should beware of triumphant religions. Religions share in the itinerant and even unfulfilled human condition.

Similar details regarding the Indic religions are also ambivalent. It is not necessary here to recall historical facts, but let us just say that they are by no means edifying. We know, for example, that from the seventh century onward for a number of reasons, including the zeal of the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite Masters, the Jaina *sangha* in Tamil Nadu had to put up with a fair amount of hostility, thus bringing about gradual decline.³³⁹ Apart from persecutions, aberrations, and superstitions, the religion that might be considered the most intellectually representative of India—Hinduism (or at least some of its branches)—has given the impression of being a world-denying religion.³⁴⁰

Culture and politics are also human constructs for the well-being of Man. Traditional religions have different ideas as to what this well-being consists of, and consequently the

³³⁹ See Deo (1956), pp. 130–31.

³⁴⁰ According to Albert Schweitzer. This is not only a Western perspective, however. Professor Hu Shih, a Chinese historian of the early twentieth century, saw Ch'an (or Zen) as the final sinicization of Indian Buddhism by secularizing it and purifying it from "the other-worldly and ascetic plague of India," as Lai & Lancaster (1983), p. xii, state in the Preface.

means they propose are also different. Orthopraxy and orthodoxy, in fact, are related. Certain trends, however, stand out, as fragments of the emerging myth: the gravity of the human predicament; the paramount urgency of *Justice*; the importance of *Ecosophy*, the need to minimize the *greed* of Man; the necessity of *Peace* for survival; the centrality of the human *Metron*; irreducible human *Dignity*, to avoid condoning the sacrifice of certain generations for the ambiguous success of the successors; the urge of the human race to forge its *Destiny* by not allowing the creativity Man feels he possesses to remain dormant. I have summarized these trends as *sacred secularity*.

These and similar values call for a vision of reality that is more in harmony with Man's aspirations. The most elementary urges of Man, in fact, are also the most fundamental. Eating, sleeping, loving, dwelling, talking, walking, thinking, dreaming, and so on are not merely material needs that must be satisfied if Man is to be free to pursue his "true labor" (basically that of "making money"). They are not accidental, something that only "primitive Man" is obsessed with, leaving him "no time" for any truly civilized activity. From the Hindū *soma*-spirituality to the Christian Eucharist, from Tantrism to the sacramental vision of reality, from the Buddhist pursuit of the happiness of all sentient beings and the Muslim surrender to the will of God to universal love and compassion, religions have emphasized the fundamental value of elementary things. There is an urgent need to overcome the modern regression from *Homo sapiens*, experiential and savoring Man, to *Homo habilis*, engineering Man.³⁴¹ Religion is not know-how but know-*what*, and also know-*when* to stop the know-*why*—because, as Buddha would say, we touch the limits of the question.³⁴²

All this requires religious awakening if we are to resist the temptation to break the natural rhythms and accelerate the cosmic processes—which is the dream of scientifico-technological ideology. There is no question either of simply glorifying the past (which is dark enough) or denigrating it by falling prey to collective alienation. India must shake off its inferiority complex and the foreign model that weighs it down, not because it is foreign, but because we (along with the best minds of other latitudes) are beginning to realize that, on the whole, the present system is not conducive to peace—personal, social, or political. Once we accomplish this, we can then begin to create new patterns of human life, an *innovation* after thousands of years of crystallized human experience in which the importing of the West plays no small part.

Here again, the role of religion is fundamental. Ultimately, the problem of Man is a religious issue. The human question is not merely economic or political, it regards the meaning of human life, the destiny of mankind, the sense of reality. Without a genuinely religious attitude in confronting a question of life and death, without the seriousness and ultimacy of the issues at stake, we cannot fully do justice to the present human situation. The very problem of technology is not technological but human. To be able to deal with these questions Man must be fully consecrated. I believe that this is, by definition, the area of religion; if it is not so, then all our discussions on religion are not only superficial but also irreligious.

At the threshold of the third millennium (following, for this purpose, a highly symbolic time-reckoning system), we must recognize that in order to attain the "glory of God," *nirvāṇa*, *mokṣa*, heaven, salvation, a better rebirth, or no rebirth at all, the survival of the human race and all living beings, happiness, justice, freedom, peace, and the like, we need to cultivate a more complete *dharma*, to acquire a deeper *ethos*, to adhere to a more genuine mystical religiousness. A new religious wave is spreading throughout the world, but in many cases it

³⁴¹ Significantly, the original meaning of *sophia*, the *sapientia* of *Homo sapiens*, corresponds to that of *Homo faber*, the *techné* of the hand, and the spirit.

³⁴² See *SN* III.189 (*khanda-vagga* II.1).

is shortsighted, fundamentalist, revivalist, and exclusivist. This shows just how important Man's religious dimension is in overcoming merely pragmatic and superficial attitudes.

We might expound at this point on how Hinduism and Islām could learn from each other, how the primordial religions and Christianity would do well to assimilate each other's wisdom, how Jainism and Sikhism could benefit from listening to each other, and so on. In short, we might point out that religious traditions should recognize the obvious, that is, that they cannot live in seclusion and that mutual fecundation is inevitable. As I have stressed, however, it is not a question of easy eclecticism or artificial syncretism, but of overcoming our fear of encounter and being open to dialogue. I will not dwell any further on this for the moment. It would be methodologically wrong to offer suggestions from the outside or mere a priori theories. The question is not only objective, it is also subjective; it belongs to the existential dynamics of human life. We are both part of the problem and of the solution.

Let us attempt now to outline a few more characteristics of the emerging myth.

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I have asked whether Indic culture is ready and able to host the innovations that come from exogenous sources. I also put the question whether three and a half millennia of Indic political experience can offer an autonomous formula for a human collective project that, while accepting the uncontestable achievements of modernity, might be more congenial to the people of this part of the earth and avoid the equally undisputable pitfalls of Westernization. I ask now how religions might grow and accept an inner conversion amounting to a transformation, which would not dilute their identity but enhance it. Perhaps the first answer to all these three questions is to say that, desirable as it may be, it would be exceedingly difficult to achieve.

It is this spontaneous reaction that points us toward the new religious answer. We can put it both ways, in fact, anthropocentrically or theocentrically. From a humanistic viewpoint, considering the real situation of the Indic peoples we have to say that the situation looks rather bleak. After so many centuries of decline, will the people of this part of the world have enough vitality and strength to undertake such a venture, let alone grasp the meaning and the virtue of it? From a religious point of view, on the other hand, the initiative does not lie with Man but with something beyond and above the human being: destiny, fate, God, the Divine, or however we choose to call it. Let me put this in more philosophical terms. Is there in reality itself a reservoir of energy, as it were, an inner dynamism, another factor to be reckoned with? Can the unfolding of human consciousness bring us to a new "revelation" of that "ground of Being" that prevents humanity from simply drifting toward premature self-immolation? In other words, is the entire adventure of the (at least) planetarian reality fatalistically condemned to self-annihilation? From an anthropocentric perspective it appears so—but is the homocentric point of view the only one to be reckoned with?

We could avoid the problem by going to the other extreme and developing a blind and fatalistic "trust" in superhuman powers. Yet it would be equally one-sided if we were to exclude the possibility that (as the *Gītā* would say) the Divine may, or rather will, descend again when the *dharma* is at its lowest ebb. Most of the living religious traditions in the nations of South Asia have retained a deep religious conviction that the "human phenomenon" is more than human, that *avatāras* are real, that God does not forsake his believers, redemption is taking place, the forces of Good will ultimately prevail, and *maitreyas*, *imams*, prophets, grace, and so on are not empty words. The religious dimension is alive, but since religious beliefs still tend to be interpreted from either a sectarian or a literal perspective they are all too often ineffective in reshaping the human situation, except perhaps for a few "elected" and "selected" groups. We might try to explain this eschatological tenet by saying that there is death in the world, and there are "atom bombs" in the sun, but this does not entitle us to manufacture

them on earth, any more than the fact of human mortality justifies killing each other. An apocalyptic attitude is not necessarily defeatist and catastrophic.

Here the religious dimension is central, and includes more particular traditional expressions and concrete interpretations. Religions are concerned with "salvation," "liberation," "freedom," "joy," and "transcendence" (without mentioning here more specific concepts of the different traditions). This phenomenon is not merely individualistic; it is collective, historical, and cosmic. Indeed, this crossing over to the other side is not an exclusively human concern; it is a cosmic venture. Prayer and/or meditation are not meaningless activities in this context. History is more than just an account of humans struggling with one another, or the field in which the Divine manipulates us as his puppets. Might we not also say, "In heaven as it is on earth"? And therefore, not only "*saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*" but "*nirvāṇa* is also *saṃsāra*"; not only "that is this" but also "this is that"; "*tat tvam asi*" because "*aham tvam asmi*," and so on.³⁴³

Summing up, we could say that just as the Gods love the impossible, so humans, as long as we are able to regard it as a challenge, an invitation, a risk, are also irresistibly drawn to it. Man is more than an animal with needs, or a toy in the hands of the Divine, or the despot of this planet. These three—the Divine, the Human, and the Cosmos—share a common Life. Certainly not democratically, but not theocratically either, much less materialistically. The three are neither equal, nor separate; neither distinct realities, nor one single reality. "All words here recoil, together with the mind."³⁴⁴ This is something that is not possible for us to grasp.

There is one consideration I feel is worth making here, since it is of a very general nature and may apply to most religions.

In describing the passive resistance of the common people and the political rebellion of the Dalits and others, I have already suggested what appears to be the only way out of the technological impasse. Perhaps a short *excursus* into the history of religion may clarify what I would like to say. From this point of view, the human achievements of the last hundred years after the European "enlightenment," and in spite of the "Europeanization of the world," are nothing but an accident of the human species—an accident, even, of the West. Once Man awakens from this technoscientific trance we will discover once again the primordial religiousness that constitutes the *substratum* of practically all the so-called great religions. What would Christianity be without its pre-Christian elements, or living Hinduism without its chthonic and Dravidian factors? What, in short, would the religiosity of the peoples of the world be without its telluric dimension?

We have systematically denigrated "primitive Man," ignoring the fact that by severing the roots that bind us to primordial Man we will cease to exist as true human beings. The alternative is not to "go back to our roots," to romanticize the past. There is much more to contemporary Man than computers, acceleration, anguish to achieve things, dread of death, and superficiality of life. There is also much more to primordial Man than ignorance, ingenuity, filth, cruelty, and "primitivism." As a Hebrew prophet put it, we should not despise our own flesh.³⁴⁵

The point I am making is this: In their transformation the so-called world religions or (worse) great religions should relearn from the tribal and/or minor religions. They should not imitate them, but they should rediscover chthonic, telluric, and mythical values. Man does not live either by bread alone or by mind alone. I am referring here to the recovery of the *mythos*, the new innocence.

³⁴³ See Mt 6:10; Nāgārjuna, *MK* XXV.19; *KathU* V.14; and also *CU* VI.8.7ff.

³⁴⁴ *TaitU* II.4.

³⁴⁵ See Is 58:7.

This observation has just one important and very concrete corollary: the overcoming of the dichotomy between religion and politics. Due to a very particular conception of religion and a very uncritical notion of politics, the post-Enlightenment period has established as a dogma the total separation between the two. And the reasons are obvious once we accept the premises of individualism on the one hand (religion is a private, individual matter) and of rationalism (politics is the rational organization of society). But these two assumptions do not hold water any longer. Religion, which is a human dimension permeating all aspects of human life, having been repressed, now explodes with violent fury in every kind of fundamentalism. Politics, meanwhile, which is supposed to handle opportunities in a rational way, has proved to be impotent in handling the human condition (never in human history have there been so many wars and victims as in the present day).

The alternatives are not theocracies or dictatorships. They imply the de-establishment of religions and the dethroning of the *logos*. Primordial religiousness offers us not a model to imitate, but certainly an example to learn from. If the very conception of politics is in crisis, the well-established traditional religions are all the more in dire need of a radical transformation.

But again, all this is not mere speculation. It is not pure mysticism or fine poetry. It is part and parcel of the human destiny and truly constitutive of our human dignity. This is why our call to Indra, "the One invoked by both sides in the battle"³⁴⁶, is more than a literary stratagem. We must play our part, and as I have said, the stakes are high. It is the destiny of being. Being is *also* in our "hands," and we must not send the ball back into the court of our God(s). *Fortuna favet audentibus*. In this lies Indra's cunning.

Indra's Divine Cunning

As we said in the beginning, these thoughts on the historical role and cosmic responsibility of India apply to Muslims, Jainas, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, secularists, and others, especially *ādivāsīs*. But I would like here to use the ancient Vedic tradition and interpret the symbol of Indra from a cross-cultural perspective, which may help to clarify our present condition. Indra might be seen as a latent symbol in an elusive myth that has still to emerge. A myth, like light, is invisible. A myth gives us a language, a point of reference, a horizon, and allows us to see things in a particular light.

There is also another reason for choosing Indra as a symbol. Indra is a God. Neither the destiny of India nor of the world at large can be properly understood and confronted without the divine factor. Furthermore, Indra is not a monotheistic God. A certain narrow understanding of monotheism may be part (though only part) of the modern predicament. What I am saying is that we cannot understand human history, and ultimately Man, without reckoning with the third factor that we may call the Divine. Democracy is a practical and more or less just method of government (within an accepted myth), but it does not take into account that the sovereignty of the people is far from being "supreme," partly because there are other populations that also claim supremacy, but above all because there are mysterious forces, as history shows, that move and govern those "sovereign" powers. There may be no God, but Man is certainly no substitute for God. And yet there is a Mystery besides (not necessarily above) Man and Nature, whose traditional name is Divinity. This third factor may be immanent in Man and the Cosmos, but it is also transcendent. We walk with our feet on the earth, but we breathe with our head in the sky. Indra might well be a symbol for our purpose.

This may be enough for us.

³⁴⁶ See *RV* II.12.8.

Indra

I shall not attempt to unravel the complicated and often contradictory characteristics of the God. The Indra of the *Rg-veda* differs considerably from that of the Brāhmaṇas and, in turn, from the Indra of later texts. He displays a polifacetic personality, and the *Rg-veda* itself tells us that he assumes the forms of all things in the universe.³⁴⁷ Indra cannot, therefore, be said to be one single being, divine or human (or both); he is, rather, a living symbol on another plane than just “our” quantifiable individuality. It is because of this character that I see “him” as the symbol of our complex situation. We must listen to Indra, hear what the *Śruti* has to say, heed his intimations and create our own narrative, or rather, carve our symbol from the polymorphous block of *śruti* and *smṛti* texts.

First of all, as I have said, Indra is a God. This is fundamental. Our adventure is not only a human concern, it is also a divine and cosmic epic. We spoke earlier of *Daivāsura*. He is the counterpart of the Greek Zeus, the Roman Jove, the Eddic Thor, the Mayan Chaac, and the Babylonian Marduk. His heir in Hinduism is Viṣṇu. The God of cosmic forces, he keeps heaven and earth separate, and is the giver of rain and happiness. He frees the waters, wins the light,³⁴⁸ and makes the sun shine.³⁴⁹ He is the Sun God, hero of some 300 hymns in the *Rg-veda* (a quarter of which, around 250, are dedicated to him). He is the most prominent of all the Vedic Gods.

“He who from birth was chief of the Gods, the wise one,
protecting with his might the other Gods,
before whose energy and mighty exploits
the two worlds tremble: he, Men, is Indra!”³⁵⁰

“Of the Gods I am Indra,” sings the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.³⁵¹

Idra, however, is an atypical God.³⁵² According to the *ekā deva*, the *tad ekam*, he is the one supreme God, but he takes on many different forms, deceives people, and seduces the wives of others. He is the most mischievous and even immoral of the Gods. “Indra by his *māyā* goes about in many forms.”³⁵³ He is beyond good and evil.³⁵⁴ Perhaps the most offensive statement to moral ears is to be found in the Kauśītaki Upaniṣad, which cites all the ruthless atrocities committed by Indra.³⁵⁵ He has not always existed; he is born and once born he illumines the sky. “My sire begot me with no foe to match me.”³⁵⁶ He

³⁴⁷ *RV* VI.47.18.

³⁴⁸ *RV* III.34.8; VIII.78.4.

³⁴⁹ *RV* III.44.2; VIII.3.6; VIII.87.2.

³⁵⁰ *RV* II.12.1. See the whole hymn in Panikkar (1977/XXV), pp. 202–4. *Sa janā sa indra* ū [He, people, He (is) Indra!] is the refrain throughout the hymn.

³⁵¹ *BG* X.22.

³⁵² “Having become the most popular of the Gods he assimilated elements of various origins, with naturalistic motives merging with background elements of a probable historical character” (see Tucci [1958], p. 570).

³⁵³ *BU* II.5.19, echoing the cited *RV* VI.47.18. The word *māyā* occurs about thirty times in the Indra hymns of the *RV*.

³⁵⁴ See *BG* II.50 and Zaehner (1969), pp. 147–48 (who provides other texts).

³⁵⁵ *KausU* III.1. See Panikkar (1977/XXV), pp. 523, 526.

³⁵⁶ *RV* X.28.6.

has been through an indefinite number of reincarnations. Śiva humiliates him, in fact, by showing him previous Indras.³⁵⁷ Indra is also a name for the individual soul. In Buddhism he begins to be degraded and in the Purāṇas he appears tired, even retired. We have here "the picture of a retired soldier."³⁵⁸ Indra, the highest of the Vedic Gods, has today disappeared from the religious horizon, or rather, he has made himself invisible and taken the form of modern science and technology. At any rate, he is a vanishing God. He is the warrior-God par excellence, the idealized symbolic Āryan "general" who conquers the first inhabitants of the Gangetic plains defended by Vṛta. He "is," therefore, also a historical figure, in that historical events form his background.³⁵⁹ We have already mentioned how he conquered the Vāsyus.³⁶⁰

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa calls him Viśvakarman, the shaper of everything,³⁶¹ perhaps taking its cue from the *Ṛg-veda*.³⁶² The same Brāhmaṇa identifies Viśvakarman with the creator Prājapati.³⁶³ The alter ego of Viśvakarman is Tvaṣṭṛ (the father of Indra), whose son Viśvarūpa was unprovokedly killed by Indra.³⁶⁴ "The thunder verily is Indra."³⁶⁵

Indra, in short, is both the compassionate helper,³⁶⁶ a friend and brother to humans,³⁶⁷ and the destroyer, the killer and the cheating God. He frustrates the deceptions of the deceitful.³⁶⁸ His genealogy is very significant. His father Tvaṣṭṛ is the one who fashioned his famous bolt³⁶⁹ and whom he killed to obtain Soma.³⁷⁰ His brothers are, on one side, Agni,³⁷¹ and on the other, Vṛtra³⁷² the demon, his mortal enemy. Another brother is Viśvarūpa. His son is Arjuna.

Perhaps one of the most significant Vedic myths is that of Śunaḥśepa, in which Indra plays an important role.³⁷³ In this myth Śunaḥśepa represents the human condition and Indra the symbol of both the tempter and the redeemer.³⁷⁴

³⁵⁷ MB I.189.

³⁵⁸ See Bhattacharji (1970), p. 266.

³⁵⁹ RV IV.26.2; VI.18.3; VIII.24.27.

³⁶⁰ See V. S. Agrawala (1963), who, in his chapter Daivāsuraṃ 111–21, defends the mythological and not necessarily historical character of all such affirmations. "Mythology is a recurrent phenomenon whereas history is fixed in time as an unalterable fact. The one is purpose or a religious idea, the other is the unfoldment of the mundane aspect in the lives of men" (p. 113).

³⁶¹ SB IV.6.4.6.

³⁶² RV VIII.87.2.

³⁶³ SB VIII.2.1.10; VIII.2.3.13.

³⁶⁴ SB XII.7.1.1.

³⁶⁵ BU III.9.6.

³⁶⁶ RV I.84.19; VIII.55.13; VIII.69.1.

³⁶⁷ RV III.53.5.

³⁶⁸ RV I.32.4.

³⁶⁹ RV V.31.4. The root *tvakṣ* or more modern *takṣ* means to form, to fashion. Hence the identification with Viśvarūpa (the omniform), who also becomes his son, and with Viśvakarman (the all-fashioner).

³⁷⁰ RV I.80.14; III.48.4.

³⁷¹ RV VI.59.2.

³⁷² See Prakash (1966), pp. 30ff. and 62ff., for relevant texts and comments. I have not included quotations for each and every statement; the reader will find most of them in Macdonnell (1963), esp. pp. 54–66, and in Bhattacharji (1970), pp. 249–283. For the RV alone perhaps the clearest presentation is in Griswold (1971), pp. 177–208. The oldest English monograph I know of is by Perry (1880).

³⁷³ See Panikkar (1979/XXVII), pp. 98–184.

³⁷⁴ [See Panikkar, "Śunaḥśepa: A Myth of the Human Condition," in *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Cross-Cultural Studies* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1983), pp. 98–184. (Ed.)]

Whatever the nature of the Gods may be and whatever theory we may adhere to regarding ancient mythologies, the figure of Indra remains most bewildering and fascinating, full of contradictions and ambiguities. To me he is paradigmatic of the human condition and charged with a powerful symbolic force for our situation.

If the ancients could show enough insight as to convert their military heroes into Gods and the astral bodies in collaborators and symbols of their struggles; if the demon Vṛtra who held back the waters was a Dravidian or proto-Indian captain resisting the Āryan invasion led by the victorious general Indra; if they viewed their conflicts as a *daivāsura* battle, aware that they were reenacting something bigger than petty feuds; if Indra, or Vṛtrahan, the killer of Vṛtra, who became Mahendra after the victory, could become the symbol of unscrupulous behavior because of his lust, ambition, and conceit; if the twin brother of Agni and father of Arjuna, the *pañcajanya* of the *Ṛg-veda*,³⁷⁵ could be interpreted by Śāyana as "beneficent to the five races of Mankind;"³⁷⁶ if the chief God of the *Vedas* and the national hero-God of the Āryans could fall from his pedestal and become an ant because, as the Rāmāyaṇa says, "No one remains an Indra permanently,"³⁷⁷ and redeem himself only by appearing in other forms; if Man is forced to fight against the Gods and be wise and strong enough to discover the power of fate and the importance of destiny; and if we could again raise human consciousness to its proper cosmotheandric place, where the actions of Men are experienced as having cosmic repercussions and divine consequences, then we could begin to understand the meaning and function of Indra in our lives. Indra is the symbol of the demonic and the divine forces struggling within Man: Vaiśvānara.³⁷⁸

Indrajāla

According to the *kathās*, the "net of Indra"³⁷⁹—his magic, power, and cunning—was used solely by Arjuna. In fact, however, its mesh extends as far as modern times. Indra was not born a God, much less the divine Lord of the pantheon. His deeds were so beneficial and portentous, however, that he was enthroned as Lord of lords. Likewise, technology was not born divine, but like the Āryans of yore, the Indians of today have raised science and technology to the highest Himalayan peak to lord over all the country and redeem us from our backwardness. In variously conscious and acute forms, technocracy seems to be regarded in many strata of Indian society as the highest God. Sarasvatī, the Goddess of wisdom (in Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) who presides over the sixty-four sciences, has bowed in awe before Lakṣmī, the Goddess of wealth, but the spouse of Viṣṇu has committed adultery, abandoned the natural fields, and joined the industrial compounds because now they produce more riches. Is this another of Indra's tricks? According to the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, in the form of the Goddess of speech (*Vāc*), Sarasvatī is the wife of Indra.

In our modern times, he who is the builder of weapons, the holder of the atomic power of the Sun, the lightning and the thunderbolt, the destroyer of walled cities and megalopolises, and the killer of all types of people has come again, and no *asura* seems to be able to resist him. He is the mighty one, the holder of the *mahāśakti*, the superpower of weaponry and money and the killer of Viśvarūpa. He is the astute God who takes the shape of Viśvakarman to make it difficult to distinguish between the genuine *techné* of the true Viśvakarman and the technology

³⁷⁵ *RV* V.32.11.

³⁷⁶ See Bhattacharji (1970), p. 278.

³⁷⁷ *Ram* VII.30.35.

³⁷⁸ Man, Vaiśvānara, the king of the worlds, *RV* I.98.1.

³⁷⁹ See *AV* VIII.8.8.

of his counterfeit. Has he now taken the form of a *kāmadhenu*-computer? Is this another trick? There is nothing more ambivalent and even ambiguous, in fact, than divine symbols.

The true Viśvakarman, and to an even greater extent Tvaṣṭṛ, symbolize not only the cultivation of the earth but also human and divine craftsmanship.

Tvaṣṭṛ is the divine artisan, the carpenter who "hews through the intellect" (*manasā takṣati*), "the maker of fair things,"³⁸⁰ the artist who carves from the very beams of the sun instruments for the Gods and booms for the ships of Man. He is the "omniscient," the maker of all things, the architect of the universe; he is the "Lord of the Arts," as the Mahābhārata describes him, the ideal artist. He is the symbol of what the Greeks called *technē*, and whose God is Vulcan. Tvaṣṭṛ is the archetype of all forms,³⁸¹ the ancestor of the human race³⁸²; he is the symbol of growth and shapes male and female; it is he who forms the human being in the mother's womb.³⁸³ He stands for a civilization of arts and crafts, of wit and creativity, and especially for the freedom to express oneself from the depth of one's own being and not merely according to the "trends," "party line," "majority," or exigencies of the megamachine.³⁸⁴

It is here that we glimpse the opportunity of Indic culture: to recognize its *rtu* or auspicious *muhūrta* (*kairos*). The Indic subcontinent is in itself a whole microcosmos, which could even represent a new model of human civilization. It has, in fact, all the elements for such a venture, though it needs the traditional non-attachment (*asakti*) if it is to rid itself of the modern Western superstructure that India has struggled to acquire in order to have power. Many other nations are too small to sustain pressure from the rest of the world, or lack an old tradition upon which they can rely,³⁸⁵ or still represent an open-ended question, like China. Earlier I tried to make it clear that emphasizing the importance and peculiarity of the Indic task in creating a new era in humankind in no way implies that other cultures and nations do not also have unique contributions. Today all the peoples of the world are called upon to do their part in solving the present crisis.

But let us return to India. Beyond the appeal of the exotic and the disgust with the present-day state of affairs, a great part of the country's fascination in the hearts and minds

³⁸⁰ RV X.2.7.

³⁸¹ RV I.188.9; VIII.91.8; SB XI, 4.3.3; TB I.4.7.1.

³⁸² RV X.17.1–2.

³⁸³ RV X.10.5; AV VI.78.3.

³⁸⁴ Without mentioning Tvaṣṭṛ, Tagore gives a description of how he envisages the Indian civilization: "Growth there must be in life. But growth does not mean an enlargement through additions. Things, such as masonry-structure, which have to be constructed by a gradual building up of materials, do not show their perfection until they are completed. But living things start with their wholeness from the beginning of their growth. Life is a continual process of synthesis. A child is complete in itself, it does not wait for the perfection of its lovability till it has come to the end of its childhood. The enjoyment of a song begins from the beginning of the singing and continually follows its course to the end. But the man whose sole concern is the acquisition of power or materials deals with a task which is cursed with eternal incompleteness. For things find no meaning in themselves when their magnitude consists solely of accumulated bulk. They acquire truth only when they are assimilated to a living idea. This assimilation becomes impossible so long as the passion for acquisition occupies all our mind, when there is no large leisure for life force to pursue its own great work of self-creation" (see Tagore [1980], pp. 65–66). This was, of course, the symbolism of Gandhi's spinning wheel. A return to a village economy and a refocusing upon the arts and crafts were central concerns of Gandhi and, to him, crucial for a successful "independence." He opposed indigenization and decentralization to an imported modernization.

³⁸⁵ See Sinha Bhattacharjea (1999), pp. 4–30.

of so many people from industrialized countries stems from their sensing that the real alternative to technocracy may be the reign of Viśvakarman, in collaboration with Hephaistos and Vulcan. Here is where I would speak of a mutual fecundation.

Significantly, all these are profoundly related: Tvaṣṭṛ to Indra, Indra to Viśvakarman, and Viśvakarman to Viśvarūpa, who takes on all forms and leads us to the discovery that it is *morphé*, form, essence, *rasa*, quintessence, and quality, not power, greatness, or quantity, that make the life of mortals like that of the Gods. As Viśvarūpa was slain by Indra, so today the menace of technocracy threatens to swallow up everything. At the same time, however, while India is in Indra's grip, Viśvakarman is dawning on the horizon, perhaps for the healing of the whole world. This is the challenge.

The classical Indic reaction to our critical global situation recalls the *nara*, the Man, the hero who, in Vedic times, is both divine and human; the drama of the *kurukṣetra* is resolved in the *dharmakṣetra*. While the former is the vision of the mental, the latter is the integral reality that can be seen only through a transformed, divinized eye.³⁸⁶ While the former is the world as it appears to the mental body, the *mano-maya-kośa*, the latter belongs to the universe revealed to the *buddhi*. As in the ancient days of the Mahābhārata, today we are facing a cosmic conflagration, and this time it involves not only the Indic universe but the entire world. And although a purely passive approach would be ineffective, neither can the "fight" be waged simply with military, economic, and political means, sacrificing entire generations of people for a problematic future welfare that ignores and ultimately despises the millions of our fellow human beings who are offered up to the God of the Future. Yet it is not a question either of "spiritualizing" the conflict and becoming blind to the historical predicament. The pitfall of many religions is their disregard (if not outright rejection or denial) of the spatio-temporal structures of material reality, having forgotten that *secularity* is sacred. Is it possible to maintain the equanimity, the "right vision" (*samyak-darśana*) so that the experience is not mere theory, but enlightened praxis?

The new Viśvakarman is not the symbol of a return to a bucolic and primitive life. "Either technocracy or primitivism"—this is a false dilemma. The new Viśvakarman stands for a new wisdom that shows us that we need neither sophisticated weapons nor even a specialized caste, the military, in order to have a peaceful life; that we do not need to break the natural rhythms to enjoy a comfortable existence; that the meaning of human life lies not in the production of means but in the cultivation of ends; that human perfection and happiness belong to the sphere of being rather than that of having; in short, that we need to create a new style of human life. If the old Viśvakarman built the hall (*sabhā*) of heaven (of Yama's heaven), the new Viśvakarman will help us to build the hall of a truly humane society—an assembly of people, not an assemblage of machinery.

The chief exploit of Indra in the *Vedas* is the releasing of the waters held back by the demon Vṛtra. Just as Vedic fantasy thus interprets what was probably a military incident regarding some Dravidian or proto-Indian tribe withholding the waters from the invading Āryans in the plains; just as, in other words, the *Vedas* were able to see the *adhyaātma* and the *adhidaiya* together, so we may also take this as another living symbol of liberation from all "artificial dams" that, for the sake of quick profits, destroy human freedom, human life, and the very life of the earth. The waters here are not just an ecological symbol; they stand

³⁸⁶ It is too tempting not to quote Nicholas of Cusa: "Quid ergo est mundus nisi invisibilis Dei apparitio? Quid Deus nisi visibilium invisibilitas?" in *De posset* II (in finem), p. 354 (ed. Gabriel). "What is then the world if not the manifestation of the invisible God? What is God if not the invisible aspect (the invisibility) of all things visible?" The invisible things are not beyond the visible but within them, like their soul.

for the primordial, uncreated primal stuff of the universe as principle of life.³⁸⁷ To hold back the waters is to hold back life and hamper human existence. All the artificial dams that modern Man has created to allow him to dominate the earth instead of nurturing *nature*, in the original sense of *physis*, are what Indra could now dismantle in order to free Man from the trap he himself has prepared. The ambivalence is confusing.

"Indra is the friend of the wanderer," says the profound story of Śunaṣṣepa.³⁸⁸ He prevents Rohita from returning to the village, and by doing this he angers all the Gods. When finally Rohita finds another victim in Śunaṣṣepa and this latter is about to be sacrificed, it is once again Indra who rescues him. Indra is both the tempter and the redeemer. Life in the villages is unbearable, and the result is the migratory flow into the slums of the megalopolises. Having learned the positive lessons of the city as well as the negative lessons of the cancerous megalopolis, however, the villager must return to the village. The term "village" here refers to the hamlet (home), the assembly of neighbors, the congregation with the earth and the sky. The change, obviously, is not an easy one. Modern economy has become the enemy of traditional economy. The former is too large and dehumanizes, the latter too narrow and suffocates. There is no going back. All that remains is to go in search of a new home, a new land, cultivating a new civilization. The exodus may involve crossing a desert, with no promised land in sight, and the masses do not easily follow any prophet. Indra was disguised as a Brahmin, but today fear reigns and no brahminhood can reassure us. What, then, is his new disguise? Gandhi came and was killed after he was betrayed by his own people.

Since we seem to be without hope
O Soma-drinker, truthful Indra,
give us hope, O generous one.³⁸⁹

The change from tradition to modernity might be summed up in the change of the meaning of a single word: economy. "Economy" today means the complex rules that govern the impersonal monetary world in which we are forced to live in order to earn our "livelihood."³⁹⁰ *Homo oeconomicus* is the concept of Man preoccupied with, interested in, and living according to the economic conditions of existence. Traditionally, the term "economy" refers to the *nomos* (tou) *oikou*, the "order of the house," the internal constitution of that outer skin of Man that is the habitat, the greater body of the person, the household. *Homo oeconomicus* was the counterpart of *homo politicus*, the *oikos* (house) and the *polis* (city) being the two anthropological structures of a complete human life—the private and the public in Greek life. This *nomos* is not a "law" dictated by the ruler or even imposed by the God, it is the first manifestation of the dynamism of reality itself. It belongs to the very essence of Being; it is the inner injunction of *rta*, *tao*, *kosmos*, *ordo* as the very revelation of what reality is. The *oikos* is not a prefabricated house or a comfortable place to rest; it is the incarnation of *ākāśa*, as it were, the proper dwelling-space where all things—Gods, humans, spirits, other living beings, and so-called inanimate beings—live and strive together in harmony (*samanvaya*, *koinōnia*) and fellowship.

³⁸⁷ See, as a single example, Baartmans (1990).

³⁸⁸ AB VII, *apud* Panikkar (1979), p. 108.

³⁸⁹ RV I.29.1, sung by Śunaṣṣepa in distress.

³⁹⁰ A few years ago, daily worldwide monetary transactions amounted to fifty to sixty times the actual buying and selling of merchandise. Capital, not real work, begets money. Since the turn of the century, the figures have skyrocketed.

In this lies Indra's cunning, in the sense of the Old English term *cunnende*, or "knowledge": to secretly invite Man to rise to such a height as once Kṛṣṇa invited Arjuna, son of Indra, to fulfill his historical duty, his *svadharma*, and then abandon him to his own destiny, entangled in the megamachine he himself had advocated.³⁹¹

Indra is a God, and the Gods also share in the human destiny. The difference between divinely inspired actions and the activities prompted by mundane motivations lies in the fact that the Gods whisper from within us, while the world allures us from the outside with prospective profits. The Gods live in Transcendence, but their field of action is Immanence. The temptation of Indra, therefore, is not the allurements of a beautiful woman (as in male-oriented literature), an appetizing plate of lentils (as another tradition maintains) or the external comfort of modern times. The temptation of Indra comes from within, from the innermost recesses not only of ourselves, but of reality itself. It is a God who tempts.

And here, indeed, the divine factor should not be overlooked. Mankind's predicament today cannot be explained away by simply placing all the blame on the scapegoat of capitalism, communism, technology, scientism, or human greed. There must be more deeply rooted reasons for the path Man has chosen to take than merely claiming that somebody somewhere made a mistake. We may find fault with nominalism, but where does nominalism come from? We may criticize atheism or attack materialism, but what makes them credible? What made the human spirit go in that direction? We cannot help but seek the answer much higher up in the heavens—which implies much deeper down in the very constitution of our being. Here we reach the very core of Being. The Gods, Man, and the Cosmos are all involved in this adventure. The Cunning of Indra lies in his having given up the right to become an *avatāra* like those of his heir Viṣṇu, and instead becomes invisible and disfigured, having taken the form of the cancerous proliferation of the artifacts of his father, Tvaṣṭṛ.

It is *Ge-Stell*, in the sense intended by Heidegger, that provokes us to substitute the experience with the experiment, to scrutinize the womb of the matter, to violate all beings we encounter because we have converted them into mere objects. We *can* (cunning) (split the atom, accelerate all natural processes, etc.); therefore we *do*. This is the cunning: the know-how without the know-why.

It is for this reason that a mere injection of morality, the preaching of ethics alone, will not stop the technological bulldozing of the world. Even if a "good" dictator were to succeed by coercion in curbing human inventiveness or restricting biological or ecological exploitation on humanitarian grounds, somewhere else in the wide world other people would escape the control. Indra's cunning is not the whim of a monotheistic God who puts Man on trial. His cunning is his own fate. How often in the Purāṇas was he ridiculed and punished for adultery, yet he repeated the feat. It is his divine destiny to seduce Men. And it is part of the *daivāsura* tension of reality to resist the Gods.

In the same Upanishadic passage where Indra boasts of his atrocities we are given a clue on how to resist the temptation of Indra. While since the days of the sybils and Herakleitos Greek wisdom might be summed up in the famous *know thyself* (*gnōthi seauton*), the human maturity that is needed if Man is to fulfill his place in the universe is formulated here by Indra's *know me* (*mām eva vijāni*).³⁹² Only by understanding that evil is not just our weakness, by

³⁹¹ "If I could start from zero, I would do things quite differently. But I have to be realistic. There is a large technological base in India which I can't throw away," said Prime Minister Indira Gandhi three years before her assassination (*Sunday*, April 30–May 6, 1989).

³⁹² *KausU* III.1. We may also translate this as "understand myself." This is a revealing feature of comparative philosophy. In practically all traditions the true and deepest self-knowledge is knowledge of God.

realizing that our vocation is of a cosmic, divine nature and part of an epic *daivāsura* rather than a merely human drama, can we disentangle ourselves from the net of Indra, the *Indrajāla*.

Let us attempt now to trace the emerging myth in greater detail. Beginning from Plato in the Western world and some Upaniṣads (or at least common interpretations of them) in the East, reality has always concealed itself from the human mind by dazzling us with the very thing we are looking at. Reality is, of course, truth (how could it be otherwise?), yet according to ancient wisdom, truth was equated with reality, and losing sight of the "third eye," the mystical vision, resulted in the human "sin," *avidyā*. The mind searches for truth, but since naked truth is invisible to the mind it becomes identified with what can be visualized: the idea. Truth was not *ṛtam*, the manifestation of the cosmic order, but *satyam*, or "beingness," the crystallization of Being (*sat*).³⁹³ The world of ideas, in fact, had a peculiar power and refulgence. It was a world in itself, the world of the mind, and gradually Man came to the stunning realization that by reducing reality to an intelligible, that is, objective world, which obeys the mathesis of ideas, this mental world would "dominate" the universe. Thus the seed of modern science was sown, and with it that of technology. It was no longer necessary to listen to the reality of things; all we had to do was extract everything that would not fit into our mental construct and manipulate what remained. The rational animal became intoxicated by its own characteristic trait. If modern science is the dominion of the abstract (not the Platonic) idea over reality, technology is the conversion of things into objects. The "uncivilized" are no longer those who do not know how to speak or know only one language, but the "illiterate" who cannot distinguish certain conventional signs (letters). The "uncultivated" are not those who have no knowledge of things and how they behave, having learned from inner experience (*educere*), but those who ignore the "laws" of objects, those who are ignorant not of the names and lives of their fellow citizens but of the latest scientific discoveries (which, nevertheless, within a week will have been superseded).³⁹⁴

One part of the Indic tradition went a similar way, but with a difference that made its destiny worse on one hand (escapism) and better on the other (survival). India discovered the power of *manas*, but also the superiority of *buddhi* and the irreducibility of *prajñā* to "know-how." Perhaps more than any Western idealism, India had the staggering experience of the absolute reality of *cit*, and this discovery is so glaring, so dazzling that the rest of reality is denied. Not all of Indic culture went in this direction or as far as this. The Tantric side of most of the Indic systems made sure it recognized at least the instrumental role of what we call the material elements or, in Christian vocabulary, the sacramental structure of the world. Similarly, the West did not take the nominalistic and scientific path. In both cases, however, the "idealistic" discovery was paramount. The difference lies in the fact that while the West experimented with conforming the material world to the structures of thought, India was not interested in examining whether the material world would follow the exigencies of thought since, ultimately, the material world was not real and therefore could not lead to real liberation. True liberation was seen as liberation *from* all the miseries and worries of the world so as to avoid being entangled again in *saṃsāra*, the transient flow of the universe. Liberation

³⁹³ The Greek *a-lētheia* suggests the un-concealment of the essence of things; *idea* is the *morphē*, the shape, the form, the face of the *physis*, nature. The Sanskrit *sat* means being in the sense of *esse*, reality, which manifests cosmic order; *Itanica satyam*, according to the *RV*. *Anṛta*, however, means "a lie."

³⁹⁴ The scientific world today produces some half a million "scientific papers" on brain research alone. If we were to read for seven hours a day, five days a week for eleven months of the year and dedicated half an hour to each paper, it would take 166 years of work to get through them. Even an abstract of abstracts would not do. Not to mention the fact that "some 52,000 pages of scientific journals are published *daily* in the U.S. alone" (see Eastham [1992], p. 8).

to be free to intervene in the dynamism of the universe was hardly considered—except in the ideal of the *bodhisattva*.

This difference is illustrated in a story that, whether real or apocryphal, is very telling. An Indian man met Socrates and asked him what he studied in philosophy. When Socrates answered that he studied human phenomena the Indian laughed and said that no one can comprehend things human when he is ignorant of things divine.³⁹⁵ The story repeats itself twenty-five hundred years later when an Indian engineer, boasting in front of a group of “illiterate” peasants, states proudly, “We have put a man on the moon.” To which one of the villagers promptly replies, “Do you know who he is?”

Indra’s strategy is to make Indians drunk with the soma of technology in order to prevent them from realizing that at least part of the destiny of the human race might lie in their hands. It is no coincidence, in fact, that they belong to the Indo-European stock from which the present situation originated, although we must also remember that the deepest strata of India may not actually be part of the Indo-European family—and here we have another example of the importance of cross-cultural fecundation. The ancient tradition of this subcontinent, therefore, might possibly give modern India the power to overcome the fiasco of the technological experiment to which mankind in general is subjected, and this, in turn, may lead to the triumph of Viśvakarman and help us pull through this technocratic interlude in the destiny of the earth and the history of Being—before it is too late. As Heidegger (and many other thinkers) so rightly sustained, no mere action can ever turn back the tide of technologism, nor will any revolution ever change that which he refers to as the “ground.”³⁹⁶

It is here that a serious cross-cultural approach may be a source of hope. Western culture alone (including Christianity) cannot cope with the situation it has triggered; nor, for that matter, is any other culture capable on its own of offering a solution. Only through symbiosis might it be possible to arouse the dormant resources in the Life (or should I say History?) of Being and precipitate change. It is at this level that the story of Indra becomes relevant. Indra, that divine force that repeatedly upset and even disgusted the Hindū pantheon, today plays his trick no longer as an exclusive Vedic divinity. Once again at loggerheads with his Vedic peers, Indra fights his own battle alone. He is that divine nonconformism, that superhuman irony that knows that only when there appears to be no way out do the cosmotheandric forces react and overcome the obstacles.

Indra’s cunning is, in fact, even more subtle than this. Being of an entirely divine nature, it is not only skillful deceit and craftiness; it is also wisdom, ability, and power, as the etymology of the word suggests. He knows and he can. This is the force of the myth: the invisible power of something taken for granted, something that goes without saying, the recovery of a new naturalness. Let me try to explain this better.

This radical change in the human situation that I have been advocating as urgent and vital will not come about by violence. I consider violence to be a violation of personhood, and personhood to be the irreducible dignity of every being. Dignity is an end in itself, not

³⁹⁵ The story is told by the church historian Eusebius in *Praeparatio evangelica* XI.3 at the beginning of the fourth century, and he attributes it to Aristoxenus, a disciple of Aristoteles in the first part of the fourth century BC.

³⁹⁶ See the essay by Haar (1983), pp. 331–58, for a brief account of the Heideggerian diagnosis. The subtitle of his essay is “Comment l’époque de la technique peut-elle finir?” We have not followed his analyses, nor does he mention at all our Indic situation. But it is an interesting example of how the present situation is crying for a radical confrontation.

a means to an end. Individuals will have to attain a new degree of awareness—to come to the realization, for example, that it is natural for human activity to produce riches, but the use of money to produce more money is basically cancer.

How can this change in kosmology come about? Generally, in fact, the emergence of a new myth is triggered only by collective upheavals, popular revolutions, great catastrophes, or singular historical feats. The collapse of the Roman Empire, the fall of Constantinople, or the ambivalent triumph of the French Revolution would be examples in the Western tradition, as well as the so-called Copernican Revolution, although the latter represents more a paradigm shift than an example of transmythicization (which, in this case, emerged slowly from Galileo to Newton, to cite just two names). On the other hand, the two world wars have produced traumas and destruction, but no change in myth. It is not an easy task to convince the peoples of the earth today that a “better” technology will not deliver the goods, and that we cannot heal the ills of modernity merely by “trying harder.” We will never convince anyone of anything unless the conviction is based on inner experience. It is easier to persuade the people of California that the computerization of society and of life is not the solution than to present the same idea in a convincing way to the people of India who have not yet sampled the goodies of this collective experience. We need Indra’s cunning to awaken us from our easy optimism, which is a form of slumber.

In practically all traditions, real knowledge has saving power—but it must be real *vidyā* and not technical skills. India’s uncanny situation has led her politicians to seek technological solutions rather than deeper transformation. The realization of India’s technological weakness could trigger the discovery of her inner strength. This divine cunning, in fact, lies in alluring us with dazzling objects and futuristic projects. Official India has not yet recognized this, and considers it just and proper to engage in the production of atomic weapons. On the other hand, however, the mature reaction of a large number of people once the first waves of nationalistic enthusiasm died down is a sign of hope. The first step toward liberation consists in recognizing that it is all merely Indra’s temptation—the temptation to believe that the universe is ruled by Man—by us, the elites, the masters of history, the scientists, the shapers of the world. This is his cunning. We still do not realize this, and carry on devising reforms.

The purpose of this study was to help remove this veil of *avidyā*. The rest is up to us, and no one else.

The Indic Experiment

I will now leave Indra and elaborate on the variations of the second subtitle of this study. Initially I had decided on “The Indic Dharma,” which I later changed to the Greek equivalent, “The Indic Ethos.” Since this study is written in English, a cultural vernacular of the Greek, as it were, it seemed fitting to use a foreign word that, unlike *dharma*, would not sound in favor of Sanskritization, which was already what elicited my doubts about the name of Indra. *Ethos*, especially in the Heraclitean sense, stands for the basic attitude of Man, his *Grundbestimmung*.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ *Ethos anthrôpô daimôn*, says Herakleitos’s cryptic Fragment 119. This might be loosely translated as “The *dharma* to Man is (his) *iṣṭadevatā*.” What constitutes the true nature of Man, the dynamism that makes Man truly a being, his *ethos*, is that he listens to his *daimôn*, his spirit, his transcendent vocation, his *antaryāmin*, the inner inspirer.

Dharma, ethos, Grundbestimmung, "primordial religiousness," "authentic human existence"—these are terms that connote what I am attempting to say. What is at stake in India is not just the political adventure of "the largest democracy of the world," or a private affair of a handful of politicians followed more or less willingly by a mass of people, or the dream of a group of intellectuals. It carries a universal responsibility (which is the message of the present Dalai Lama).³⁹⁸ It is a chapter in the destiny of creation, a chapter that has been compiled from many different sources: the primordial religiousness of the ādivāsīs and the Jaina *nirgranthas*, the Ṛsis of the *Vedas* and their Buddhist critics, the pre-Socratic sages and their sophistic followers, the sages of the forests and their patronizing civilizers, the prophets of Israel, Persia, and Mecca and their Christian and secularized challengers, the scientists of the West and their Eastern colleagues—all these forces have forged the *karma* of India. This *sangam* constitutes the Indic subcontinent. It should be clear that, though I began with a sociological approach and made political comments, this study takes very seriously the worldview of other cultures and is concerned with the ultimate meaning of life and the cosmic responsibility of human freedom, using a relevant historical example. This cannot be stressed enough. Our study is a philosophical reflection on the human condition that is intrinsically bound to the fate of all reality.

In the end I chose a more common expression: *The Indic Experiment*.

I have used the term "Indic" to express that although I have concentrated mainly on the Republic of India, the problems are not confined within the nation-state borders (which have already shifted several times) but refer to the entire subcontinent.

"Experiment," meanwhile, expresses a somewhat ambivalent and ironic idea.

On one hand, I have used the word "experiment" instead of "experience" because an experiment is an attempt, not a solid conviction based on experimentation, nor yet an inner search into the depths of one's soul. This, therefore, explains the sociological data. On the other hand, using the term "experiment" enables me to affirm that the experiment is failing. Since this experiment is a kind of external approach to reality, its failure does not affect the innermost being of the people—as long as we recognize and accept quickly that the experiment is not yielding the expected results.

And here we have a glimpse of what is one of the characteristic traits of the Indic subcontinent, although it is common to tropical cultures. Cold climates tend to freeze exogenous inputs and keep them isolated, while warm climates tend to absorb external influences and assimilate them. Coexistence is easier in cold climates; symbiosis is more natural in tropical cultures. I am directed to say this. India has received modern Western technocratic input, and its first reaction was one of accepting, imitating, embracing, and assimilating. However, the experiment has now lasted long enough for its results to be visible, and it is easier for us to evaluate the fruits of the experiment, since the very culture that gave birth to the technocratization of the world is now beginning to worry about it and to ask more essential, religious questions.

I have avoided the subject of postmodernity (which has become fashionable in many academic circles in the West) for the reason that it is simply a monocultural reform of modernity, if not a mere reaction to it. We are dealing with a genuine cross-cultural problem. And yet the phenomenon of "postmodernity" in general bears witness to what I am saying, that is, that the West itself is beginning to question its own modern premises and perhaps does not know how to disentangle itself from its own assumptions.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ See Tewari & Nath (1995).

³⁹⁹ See Sherrard (1991) for a more metaphysical diagnosis of the present civilization.

We should no longer blindly accept the propagandistic slogan that because modernity has worked for quite a few it is going to succeed with all. The worldwide results of the last thirty years and the most diverse analyses of the global situation of the earth give ample evidence that this technocratic civilization has no future.⁴⁰⁰ To tell us that we need patience and that science will solve the problems is no longer convincing.

The stereotyped "religious" discourse that exhorts us to be patient in our current afflictions because better things are in store for us in the afterlife is, after all, more credible than the technocratic belief that our great-grandchildren, whom we will probably never see, will one day enjoy the benefits of our present distress.⁴⁰¹ Here we see again the transfer of old traditional religious beliefs to a more secularized framework.

I am not only pragmatically affirming that the experiment has not succeeded. I am laying out the theoretical reasons why the experiment cannot work. If it were solely a question of pragmatism we may as well try again, try harder, and wait another fifty years. It is the praxis that has led the perceptive thinkers of East and West to revise the theory. There is no doubt that the Enlightenment and industrialization did have some positive influence. It is through the deepening of its assumptions and the encounter with other cultures that one begins to discover the reductionistic view of *Man*, the simplistic judgment of *Nature*, and the naïve idea of the *Divine* that underlie the modern techno-scientific project. The amount of literature dealing with this today is vast.

The Indic experiment is nearing its end. This end may be a catastrophe brought about by the triumph of technocracy at the expense of the masses, who will rebel and be crushed, or it may be one of those apparently inexplicable changes that occur more often than is generally assumed in the history of mankind. No one who has studied such collective movements can deny the inexplicable power of myth by which millions of people suddenly seem to fall into a kind of trance, spreading a sort of enthusiasm that previously appeared impossible. These movements can occur either after a victory or a defeat, after a major event or something completely trivial. There are hundreds of examples in modern history, including the Front Populaire victory in 1936 or the Mai 1968 events in France, the enthusiasm aroused by Gandhi in certain moments of his campaign, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and so on. While they are generally short-lived, the effects of these "explosions" tend to linger. In themselves these effects are basically superficial—unless (and this is the crux of the matter) the people are ready for a more lasting change. Here I have used to term "myth" rather than "logos," because myth has the capacity to create a new world, and to make that which previously seemed impossible or implausible seem almost natural.

This is the power of myth. Islām conquered almost half of the known world in the span of a few generations. Christianity spread throughout Europe at an incredible speed, and it took no more than one lifespan for communism to expand across the nations of

⁴⁰⁰ One macro example is the relentless increase in the global deficit. It cannot last forever—not only because the earth has its limits but also because the market will eventually (and there are already indications of this) reach saturation point. As a Bengali saying states, "He who mounts a tiger can never dismount again."

⁴⁰¹ A significant example is the change in the political canvassing of the Communist Party of Kerala. The communists won their first democratic victory by playing on the much-needed changes for the immediate future. However, they were unable to fulfill all their promises and in the following elections they lost. They learned their lesson. The propaganda for the new elections (which they won again) no longer focused on an immediate better future but on more spiritual themes like justice and peace, using even religious symbols.

the earth—secondary causes notwithstanding. We cannot neglect the immediate, but secondary causes. Indeed, the violence used to force populations to convert to another religion, the abuses of the powerful, the cries of the poor, and the assault of conquerors have all contributed to these changes, but why did they succeed at one time and not at another? What made the people inclined to believe in equality, independence, rights, and so on at a certain point rather than at another theoretically possible opportunity? We should be aware that there are other forces at work in human history than merely action-reaction and ideological or economic factors. As I said earlier, the *kurukṣetra* of history is the *dharmakṣetra of the Gods*. The Christian *perichôresis* or trinitarian interpretation of reality, the Buddhist *pratītyasamutpāda*, the universal inter-in-dependence of all things, and so on, are more than just pious metaphors.

The Indic *psyché* contains enough dormant archetypes that it has the potential to awaken to one such miraculous feat. Perhaps Indra is secretly awaiting this awakening.

In interpreting the experiment the Indic contribution may be important, but it is not the only one.

World history cannot be written in black-and-white. The Indic experiment has failed to create a new culture that is congenial to the peoples of this part of the world, but it has yielded some results that are very positive (albeit so far only for the Indian middle class) and has uncovered the many weaknesses of Indic cultures (which are, in any case, at a low ebb). In this sense, if the experiment must end, the lessons drawn from it are vital and need to be seriously considered in the possible symbiosis. I would like to emphasize once again that the social problem of India would perhaps not have become so consciously acute without the Western impact.

Summing up the Indic experiment I would say this: India has tried to imitate the West, believing that technoscience is not exclusively a Western but a universal culture. In spite of its conspicuous short-term success among the minority, however, I am convinced that this experiment will fail. Western culture or technocratic civilization is not a universal value, and Gandhian "passive resistance" is being reenacted here in a more subtle and unconscious way. People will soon discover that they are by no means happier, while the increasing "conscientization" of those who have not been invited to the technological banquet will develop into violence—as is already happening on a smaller scale. The recognition of this failure may be the beginning of the "conversion." And this applies not only to India but to the entire world.

Let us attempt for a moment to take the pulse of the last five hundred years of world history, in which we have witnessed the "Europe-ization" of the world. In 1876 Europe and the United States of North America owned 10.8 percent of the entire African continent and 51.5 percent of the whole of Asia, plus, of course, 100 percent of Australia and 56.8 percent of Polynesia. By 1900 (that is, in less than a quarter of a century) they controlled 90.4 percent of Africa, 56.6 percent of Asia and 98.9 percent of Polynesia.⁴⁰² After the Second World War most of these countries became "politically" independent, but economically and culturally they had virtually no possibility of creating any independent alternative to the Western model. In fact, the dependence of these countries is greater now than in the colonial period.⁴⁰³ At the same time, they no longer have the "excuse" of protesting against the element of "foreignness" because the new rulers are now Westernized "natives."

⁴⁰² See Larouche (1989), p. 87. It is significant that these statistics were quoted by Lenin.

⁴⁰³ I have already cited the economic inequalities. We might sum this up by saying that Africa's GDP of 700 million (30,180,808 km²) is lower than Belgium's 10 million (30,500 km²) (PNUD, 1999)—while, of course, the wealth of the continent is not, since it is in Western hands.

*

If I have not offered any blueprint or even a hint as to how we might bring all this about it is not because of tactical prudence, but because of the nature of the problem itself. The alchemic transformation I am suggesting is not a mere chemical reaction created with the elements at hand. It belongs to another order—the order of the spirit, the order of creation, or to use a play on words (but not on concepts), the meta-physical realm. As I have said, myths grow, change, and disappear, but they cannot be manipulated because they do not depend on our will. We may, however, create the conditions for the emerging of a new myth. I believe these conditions might be found in a critical deepening of the older traditions of the subcontinent, taking care not to overlook any—especially the scientific tradition. The method required for the task is neither induction nor deduction. As the Latin aphorism says, *Vox populi vox Dei*. I would invert the translation and say, “Let us listen to the Gods.”

On a realistic note I will conclude by saying this:

We cannot, and should not, exterminate the technoscientific political complex. It must, rather, be transformed through an alchemic metamorphosis of historical proportions. The West, even though in its moments of lucidity it would like to do this, cannot take on the task alone, but the latent energy of the peoples of India could substantially contribute to the process. This is the tryst with the Sacred Secularity of the present day.

Cultures and civilizations rise and fall. In the last six thousand years of human history, we have already witnessed these processes at least a dozen times.⁴⁰⁴ It is astonishing how little contemporary thinkers apply this thought to themselves. We seem to absolutize our own worldview while relativizing all the other conceptions of the world. What I am suggesting is that India could well be an important factor in this transhistorical period.

One objection may be made by those who believe in the “global village,” the unified “world order,” and the single culture. While in the past the earth was not unified, they say, and one empire followed another, today we have reached the extremes of the earth not only geographically but also historically.

Even the “Second World Power” has given way to one single system, political, economic, and intellectual. We are not at the end of a linear evolutionary progress—and here is where Indra laughs.

Indeed, within the narrow parameters of modernity and postmodernity we cannot “see” how it might be possible to transcend linear time and history, experience matter and space in a different way, and relativize our conceptions as we have relativized all other kosmologies. We have long been under the influence of the previously cited “Europe-ization of the world.” This is precisely the challenge, not because Europe and the West are not great civilizations, but because they too are mortal. Modern Man’s terror of death, which he tries so hard to conceal, is translated here into the equally well hidden dread of a cultural death.

Perhaps Indra’s cunning, as in the case of Śunahśepa, lies in bringing us to the verge of death. If so, the failure of the Indic Experiment may help to resurrect Man and make him once again fully human, not just a spare part in a machine. Some people may call this the cosmic and historical law of the Cross.

⁴⁰⁴ Toynbee (1972) is an example of what I mean here.

THE VITALITY AND ROLE OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY TODAY

Methodological Remarks

1. *The results depend on the method.*

The answer to any problem is a function of what we see. What we see is conditioned by our perspective, that is, by the method we adopt.

2. *The method depends on the philosophy we follow.*

There is a *vital circle* enveloping our methods and the overall existential situation of our philosophizing. This is a fact that determines the limits of all our speculation: the method depends on the philosophy one holds, and the philosophy being held conditions the method one adopts. Only from a logical point of view is this circle vicious, because life is not reducible to mere logic, nor do we start our speculations from zero. What we need is a critical reflection on the criteria we use in our philosophical analysis.

3. *The criteria we apply in deciding what is alive and what is dead in Indian philosophy depend on previously held philosophical views.*

For some, truth is alive, no matter how dead it may be sociologically. For others, something that does not have the power to transform human existence cannot be said to be living—to take only the extreme cases. We must find some points of agreement if we are to proceed in a collegial way.

4. *In a pluralistic philosophical situation, there can be a certain consensus only in mythical meta-criteria or in nonphilosophical, pragmatic concessions.*

The first alternative represents an inherent limitation of philosophy, and depends on what we take for granted, and thus agree upon, either consciously or unconsciously. The horizon of such a consensus is provided by the myth in which we live. There is, for instance, a certain agreement today that philosophy—in whatever sense we may understand it—has to be relevant for people in general; that it cannot be reduced to an uncritical repetition of the past, and so on.

The second alternative represents the death of philosophy as a free and ultimate inquiry, for it would have to assume that a nonphilosophical power, say the state or the church, has the right to dictate what philosophy has to deal with.

We have, thus, three possibilities: to be commanded by a nonphilosophical agency (thereby being placed at the service of some other will), to follow the criteria of our particular philosophical systems (to use any other), to agree upon some meta-criteria (becoming open to dialogue and interaction).

5. Meta-criteria are necessary but not sufficient.

Meta-criteria are formed by the basis on which the different and divergent criteria (of the concerned philosophies) lie. They allow a free interplay among the different criteria emanating from the diverse philosophical views. They provide the horizon that makes dialogue, interaction, and even disagreement possible. But they are not, properly speaking, criteria to be applied, because they provide only the arena where the discussion can meaningfully take place. Meta-criteria may be of some help in finding acceptable criteria to people of different philosophical persuasions. Some meta-criteria are, for instance, that philosophy should be relevant, that it should open us to a clearer vision of truth, but they do not tell us how we can detect such a relevance or find truth.

6. Phenomenology may offer us an acceptable starting point.

The proof of the cake is in the eating. It is a question of trying it.

Phenomenological Analysis

1. The phenomena we detect correspond to the present-day socio-historical situation.

We should mind that we do not universalize our conclusions. Nobody can sensibly claim to cover the universal range of the human experience. The temporal factor should not be overlooked, for it plays an important and limiting role. We can only speak for our time and place, although these two categories can embrace much more than our day and our village.

2. "Indian, or rather Indic philosophy" here means the classical systems, the āstika or orthodox and the nāstika or heterodox.

This seems advisable in order to reduce the field of our inquiry and focus our discussion. Considerations regarding the nature of philosophy and its distinction from theology and religion, such as the relation between *dharma*, *darśana*, *brahmavidyā*, *ātmajñāna*, and so on, should be overlooked in this particular context. Philosophical systems coming from Islam, Christianity, aboriginal wisdom, and so on, important as they may be, will also have to be disregarded here.

3. "What is living" means that which is sufficiently present so as to be effective either (a) on the visible, conscious, and sociological level, or (b) on the invisible, unconscious, and anthropological level, or on both. "Effective" means affecting life to some non-neglectible degree.

Something can be present among a sociologically powerful group and yet have hardly any roots in the Indian soil, or vice versa. The discrepancy between the two levels creates the complexity of the problem. Here the question of alienation becomes relevant.

The term "living" should be free from axiological overtones. To be living does not mean to be good and true: it could be equally harmful and wrong. Yet there is an intimate relationship between life and values that is in itself a peculiar philosophical problem.

4. "What is dying" means that which is sufficiently absent so as to be ineffective on one or both of the above-mentioned levels.

The term "dying" seems more proper than the term "dead," not only to avoid exaggerations, but also because human existence, on every level, is an "in-between life and death." The whole of existence *ek-sists* in a two-way transit between life and death, and it is the tension between the two that constitutes our factual situation.

5. *What is dying in Indian philosophy is: (a) on level (a), practically every idea tied up with obsolete cosmologies; (b) on both levels, most of the systems as they were once taught; and (c), mainly on level (a), many religious institutions and practical implications of those systems.*

a. The greatest impact of modern science can be seen not in the technological gadgets that science has made possible, but in the change of worldview it has brought about. Today, anything contradicting the "scientific" worldview has very few chances of survival. Miracles and *apsaras* (spirits) may be still considered real, but they have to pass through the sieve of "science"—whether this be valid or not. This point is less applicable in the case of Indian peasants, but even in this case watching television, or at least the "belief" that such a thing is possible and real, has fundamentally changed the cosmological background against which their conceptions of reality lie—to illustrate a long process with a single example. There is no philosophy without a cosmological ground, either declared or undeclared. We face, today in India, a phenomenon similar to the collapse of the medieval worldview in Europe. The *Purāṇas* may still be very much alive, but currently they are being "set" in a different framework, which alone permits them to live.

b. Some schools of *vedānta* could be said to be an exception to this, and yet there seems to be a general agreement that even they are in decline, and that they are, anyway, simply expurgated and oversimplified versions of the traditional *sampradāyas*.

c. Traditional institutions are on the wane; they exercise less and less influence on the ordinary life of the people. The caste system, for example, may still be strong in certain milieus, but its preservation is primarily due to inertia, and it seems to have been stripped of whatever rationale that once made it at least meaningful. Furthermore, traditional Indian philosophy shaped a social order and created an anthropological situation that are hardly alive today. Many aspects of the old order survive, but the wind of change seems irresistible and has already blown unto the four corners of the country. Not only are *gurukulas*, *Vedic* practices, and *mīmāṃsā* (interpretation) categories declining, but the practice of shaping one's life according to the views of the traditional systems is also disappearing, in spite of the many noble efforts for a renewal. Indeed, the very existence of reform movements shows that the "unreformed" systems are dying.

6. *What is living in Indian philosophy is its spirit, which can be detected in (a) mumukṣu or the unquenched desire for liberation, and (b) yukti or the holistic approach to reality, especially the ultimate questions.*

a. An all-pervading conviction seems to be very much alive throughout India. Philosophers have given it the most variegated names, such as *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*, *bhoga*, *jñāna*, *apavarga*, *ānanda*, *brahman*, *tattvajñāna*, etc. These names may represent a human invariant, yet they have a peculiarly Indic slant. The vast majority of the people of India still react positively to the idea of liberation and emancipation, even if it is often interpreted in socioeconomic or political terms. There is in *mukti*, freedom, an aura of "plus" that seems to indicate that this goal of human existence, whatever it may consist in, is worth pursuing.

b. There is a synthetic feature that some will say belongs to the very Indic mind, and which undoubtedly belongs to the spirit of Indic philosophy: an all-embracing or integrated ideal of truth and perfection. *Jñāna* or knowledge does not only mean a technical know-how or specialized cognition. A sage in India has to be holy as well as learned, while an unethical person is not considered capable of purely intellectual achievements; religion and ethics, the sacred and the profane, theory and praxis, and so on all go together. Except for a tiny minority among the British "educated" people, hardly anybody in India considers philosophy as just

another science or as an analytical endeavor. On the contrary, it is seen as an all-embracing wisdom having constitutive links with religion and holiness. The salvation Man longs for is an integral state including *sarvam*, "all"—from which the very word "salvation" comes.

Theoretical Considerations

1. *It is the task of philosophers in India not only to analyze passively the "status quo," but to intervene actively in the "fluxus quo" by taking a stand in determining what should live and what should die in Indian philosophy.*

Thus we need both a critical analysis of the situation and practical proposals based on such an evaluation of the nature and function of philosophy itself. There is no need to recall that classical Indic philosophy was part and parcel of the people's life.

2. *The main factors Indian philosophy will have to deal with are (a) the technological civilization, (b) the pan-economic system, and (c) the Western way of life.*

Philosophy cannot be cultivated *in vitro*. Its ground is the living soil of the philosophizing people. It is for his fellow beings that philosophers properly philosophize. The three factors of rupture modify not only the results and the methods of Indian philosophizing today, but the philosophical activity in its very roots. Today, philosophy in India—as elsewhere—has to address itself not only to the rethinking of solutions, but to the awareness of the problems themselves, and ultimately of reality. Indian philosophy cannot live in an *enclave*.

3. *The main element of continuity in Indian philosophy today is the inborn urge for mokṣa or liberation, to be understood according to the divergent interpretations of the different philosophies, ancient or modern.*

A permanent factor, common to both the traditional philosophical systems and the present-day mentality, seems to be the human longing for emancipation. This dynamism confers unity and purpose to the philosophical enterprise. If the desire to know Being can be said to be the central thrust of Western philosophy, the desire for liberation characterizes Indian philosophy. Against the *satyajijñāsa* of the West we could present the *mumukṣutva* of India as the main concern of philosophy. This *mukti*, however, does not need to be interpreted in *one* particular way. The study of *what* makes Man free should constitute the central philosophical question for our times.

It is this element of continuity that is largely responsible for the tremendous appeal of Indian wisdom throughout the world today. This gives Indian philosophy a relevance far beyond its traditional boundaries, not only geographically and historically but also philosophically, as we will suggest when affirming that philosophy today must be cross-cultural (see more below).

4. *The concept of "philosophical relevance" cannot be dictated from outside philosophy, but must spring from the nature of the philosophical inquiry itself.*

We should here recall what has been said about the criteria governing the philosophical inquiry. For some philosophers, certain types of problems are considered more important than others. We repeat: The fact that we have not mentioned something here does not mean we underrate its importance. The philosophy of mathematics and aesthetics, for instance, should not be neglected. The specific problem under examination, however, is not the nature of all philosophy, but the situation of Indian philosophy today.

5. *The main philosophically relevant areas are (a) social philosophy, (b) philosophical anthropology, and (c) philosophy of religion.*

To persist in looking for relevance in any of the classical disciplines, such as metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and so on, would only increase the gap between past and present, and reinforce the divisions between the philosophical disciplines. We need precisely to overcome such watertight compartments. Furthermore, these three areas of inquiry require the collaboration of all philosophical disciplines. To concentrate on clarifying traditional notions such as *ātman*, *brahman*, *cit*, *ānanda*, and so on, may set a priori limits to what should be a free philosophical enterprise. It may further divert us from an analysis of our contemporary understanding of reality and impose categories from the past on our thought—relevant as they may prove to be. Moreover, all these problems will reemerge in their proper setting in the process of tackling the three proposed areas.

In sum, these three areas of concern do not exclude traditional disciplines or Indic categories, but reorient them to serve living issues.

6. *It is imperative for philosophy in India today to scrutinize sociological problems, for example, (a) the possible juxtaposition, superimposition, interaction, or symbiosis between currently emerging institutions and traditional patterns; (b) the meaning of current slogans and myths such as "democracy," "secularism," "socialism," "humanism," "scientific progress," and so on, and (c) the issue of justice.*

It goes without saying that here "social philosophy" does not mean a purely descriptive and quantitative sociological behaviorism. Especially in India, sociology cannot divorce from its ontological foundation and religious implications.

a. If the subject matter of philosophy is reality, a social philosophical study cannot fail to see two Indias painfully "coexisting" in our times. Tradition and modernity have not yet married. The philosopher here has a priestly function. The world of work, family life, political involvement on all levels, and so on, are urgent philosophical issues that need a theoretical clarification as much as a practical orientation.

b. It has always been the task of a living philosophy to take a stand regarding existentially burning issues, and to clarify the powerful "ideational" forces that drive individuals and peoples, in order to help the emancipation of Man, so often caught in mere slogans, or else hopelessly exploited. To rescue Man from the fear of the higher powers and the anxiety about the underworld has ever been a driving impulse behind any authentic philosophy. The corrective and critical function of philosophy should be applied here.

c. Nothing is more deleterious than living on borrowed ideas and ideals. Almost every great philosophy has elaborated the intellectual foundation on which the idea of justice should be grounded. The very fact that many Indic systems have neglected this point calls for a more thorough study today.

7. *Philosophical anthropology is relevant today insofar as both the technological civilization and the scientific era are based on a conception of Man that needs fundamental research.*

Philosophy of science and technology have all too often taken an image of Man for granted, which had been provided by a mainly Western intellectual history, without considering that the Indic anthropological assumptions, for instance, might be different. It is the task of the philosopher, as well as the politician, to tackle this problem, which generally escapes the technician and scientist, for it requires a radical questioning of the very foundations of the concept of *Homo faber et technicus*.

8. *Philosophy of Religion has a special relevance, for religions show an intriguing ambivalence, being at once the best but also perhaps the worst feature of Indic culture.*

"Throwing the baby away with the bathwater" is neither philosophical nor efficient. Indic philosophy has been intrinsically connected with the religious urge of Man; in fact, it has been the intellectual side of religion, as it were. Traditional religions may not satisfy us any longer, but an uncritical dismissal of religiousness will not do justice to truth or to Man. Religious inflation is not cured by philosophical poverty.

Philosophical Orthopraxis

1. *Philosophy is not mere ideology.*

Philosophy is as much a theoretical activity as it is pregnant with action. The function of philosophy does not consist in justifying any given state of affairs, but in enhancing Man's awareness, and—by this act—improving Reality itself.

Radical criticism is a feature of any authentic philosophy. Philosophy questions itself and is ready to make a total self-sacrifice for the sake of the philosophical activity. The critical self-reflection of Indian philosophy should be free from a-priori attitudes of defense or attack. Indian philosophers are, willy nilly, caught up in the crossing of philosophical currents, which conditions their own philosophizing.

2. *Indian philosophy will be relevant if Indian philosophers are authentic philosophers, that is, (a) if we feel the excruciating problems of our times on an ultimate level, (b) if we suffer the human condition of our people, (c) if we think problems through in order to clarify them, and (d) if we struggle to find ways to solve them.*

Philosophy is more than a noncommittal brooding on safe issues, and also much more than an uncritical plunge into action. It is more than just teaching, and also more than simple involvement. In a word, Indian philosophy will be relevant if it is truly philosophy—and not just a regurgitation of past "glories."

The main task of philosophers is not to "teach" a discipline called "philosophy" but to live it, to spread it, just as the *ṛṣis* spread the sacrifice. Philosophers should not constitute a sort of closed and self-perpetuating body, which is kept alive solely for the sake of its own preservation.

3. *Philosophy today—and Indian philosophy is no exception—has to be cross-cultural.*

The very ground of philosophical speculation today is cross-cultural. Indian philosophy has to meet this challenge, not hiding behind an impregnable bulwark, but allowing itself to be thrown as a seed into the soil of the contemporary world.

Cross-cultural philosophy does not mean comparative philosophy, if by the latter term we understand the comparison of philosophies. Philosophy does not deal with "philosophy" or "philosophies" but with reality, and with all the means that Man has at his disposal at the ultimate level of understanding.

Cross-cultural philosophy implies the awareness that both the ground or starting point of philosophical speculation, and its results, answers, or clarifications, spring from and are addressed to a cross-cultural human situation. Our human situation is today, generally speaking, a more or less confused mingling of cultures and the interaction of many worldviews and lifestyles. It belongs precisely to philosophical awareness to create a certain order in the present-day mingled state of affairs. Cross-cultural philosophy is thus both an exigency and an aim.

Cross-cultural philosophy assumes that there is no neutral platform on which one can casually philosophize. The cross-cultural approach studies the philosophical problems in the light of more than one philosophical tradition, trying to integrate the immense variety and riches of human experience. A new kind of hermeneutics is required here: morphological and diachronic hermeneutics are not sufficient. Diatopic hermeneutics is needed, not as a substitute for the other two, but to complement them.

4. *Indian philosophers today could be exceptionally well equipped to play a leading role in India and the world. They can have a firsthand experience of (a) classical Indic culture, (b) Western civilization (and non-Western cultures), and (c) modernity.*

This exceptional socio-historical possibility entails the exceptional danger of schizophrenia or of a defensive caste isolationism. Syntheses are as barren and pernicious as those attitudes that are deemed self-sufficient, which lead to arrogant withdrawals. Philosophy today cannot be fruitfully cultivated in isolation, nor—obviously—in superficial relations.

a. Classical Indic philosophy may have to undergo a painful and fundamental transformation, but it has not yet spoken its last word. On the contrary, all evidences lead us to think that its role will become increasingly crucial if it remains loyal to its genius. "Indian" philosophy is not a "racist" concept; rather, philosophers steeped in the still-living Indic tradition are exceptionally fit to imbibe a spirit that implies more than general ideas or abstract principles.

b. The many centuries of more or less happy symbiosis between India and the West also account for the fact that what goes under the vague heading of "Western philosophy" is in no way foreign to the cultural climate of India, although we might wish that Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and French elements had a greater philosophical impact in order to complement the predominant Anglo-Saxon influence. Goa and Pondicherry could have become philosophical symbols if only they had not been polarized into exclusively political issues.

c. Modernity today can no longer be equated with *one* particular culture, despite its notably "Western" connotations. Philosophers in modern India, like anyone else, bear the excruciating burden of finding their way in the present-day situation. We are certainly all at a crossroads.

5. *The revitalization of philosophy, and thus of Indian philosophy, depends, to a great extent, on "dialogical dialogue" to provide the proper mode of philosophizing. Dialectical dialogue is not sufficient.*

The clarification of existentially decisive issues cannot be entrusted to a merely dialectical interplay, which assumes that the epistemic principle of noncontradiction also has a supreme ontological value, and thus is the only possible basis for deciding the validity of a philosophical intuition.

Dialectics is a fundamental philosophical method; what contravenes the principle of noncontradiction cannot seriously claim to have any philosophical validity. But dialectics is not enough for the present philosophical situation.

Dialogical dialogue does not take the place of dialectics, but complements it. It is not based on a common confidence in the neutral field of logical dialectics, but on a genuine mutual trust in the other, that is, on the fact that the other is a source of understanding and of original perspective just as I am, and that, as a consequence, the person does not only merit human respect, but philosophical attention as well, even if I do not exactly understand the person's opinions. Dialogical dialogue is a real "going through the *logos*" (*dia ton logon*) so as to overcome—not deny—the *logos* by piercing through it and reaching that other sphere of human experience that only the confidence in the other qua other can make possible. In the

dialogical dialogue, I open myself to the other so that my partner may discover my myths, my underlying assumptions, and criticize the very foundations of my convictions—and vice versa, of course.

Dialogical dialogue does not stop when we come to a logical impasse, or when I convince the partner of contradiction. At this point, in fact, the dialogue looks for another way to proceed further and deeper, and does not cease until we have reached a common myth on which we may both rest, because neither questions it. The common ground here is not the logical arena, but the total human reality. Dialogical dialogue implies, obviously, the belief that I am not self-sufficient in constructing a complete picture of reality, and that the other can offer a fundamental contribution (not only a minor correction to my, by then frozen, convictions). This is why dialogical dialogue opens us up for radically new vistas. The real dialogue is neither what I say or what my partner adds, but what happens in the dialogue itself, something about which neither I nor the other party have any previous knowledge.

This is why dialogical dialogue is risky. It cannot be pre-planned, nor can we determine its results.

I may be convinced, or change my mind, or a new awareness may emerge. In any case, the rules of the dialogue are not presupposed a priori or dictated by one of the partners. Today, Indian philosophy can have a creative encounter with the other philosophical worldviews (which are alive even in the very soil of India) only by means of this authentic dialogical dialogue.

Practical Suggestions

1. *Everything depends on the conviction that the philosophical activity is of the utmost importance, and that the time, attention, and money given for this are not superfluous luxuries.*

Philosophies often have an inferiority complex, which creates a pernicious feed-back feeding a vicious circle: the bigger the complex, the greater the actual sociological inferiority of philosophy. Philosophy considers itself of little importance in the actual situation of India, and this very belief is, at least in part, the cause of its meager importance and very limited impact.

2. *The nature of our problem is fundamental, so it calls for radical measures. Minor adjustments may prove to be counter-effective and merely prolong a status quo that needs to change fundamentally.*

Radical change does not mean hurried and improvised reforms, but the experience of the last twenty-five years of Indian university life should be a warning and a challenge. We cannot perpetuate a system that corresponds neither to the vital needs of the people nor to the very nature of philosophy. The implementation should be progressive and prudent, and the plan thorough and far-reaching. Philosophical thinking is always bold and radical; courage and imagination are also philosophical virtues. It is not a matter of giving luster to a once glorious philosophical past, but of making philosophy in India what it should and could be: a school, a place of real wisdom that serves to emancipate the human being from the bondage of ignorance—to use a particular traditional language, although not necessarily in its traditional sense.

3. *The post-Renaissance Western notion of "philosophy" as a discipline among other disciplines should be superseded. Authentic philosophy permeates all spheres of academic as well as of human life, in an ontonomic way.*

This is such a radical suggestion that we may not be prepared to implement it, but it could, at least, be studied. The first step would be to create chairs or prescribe "papers" of philosophy in

all university faculties and educational institutions. One could begin with "higher education" and then proceed to the more "elementary" schools. This would also have the effect of creating more "jobs" for philosophers, thus hopefully enhancing both the number and the quality of students attracted by a professional cultivation of philosophy. Schools of engineering, medicine, law, technology, and so on, should all teach philosophy in an adequate manner. The traditional *Studium generale* of the medieval universities and the requirements on "widespread knowledge" could provide a model that, however, should be improved.

Instead of the *autonomous* reaction of particular sciences against the *heteronomous* dominance of philosophy and theology, which was the pattern in the past, a more balanced and harmonious *ontonomic* relationship is required.

Most modern disciplines and sciences in India are offshoots of Western philosophy; they are not the children of the traditional Indian *darsanas*. This both facilitates the integrating task of Indian philosophy and makes it more difficult. It facilitates the task because of the absence of historical resentments and cultural misunderstandings. It makes the task more difficult because the synthesis, which should remain open, has to be freshly created.

To provide an open but consistent and comprehensive world picture, to offer a universal frame of reference remains one of the most important tasks of philosophy. This task cannot be left to a few specialists, and much less to sociology. The dialogical dialogue mentioned above is not restricted to "philosophers" or "philosophies" alone, but involves all branches of human activity.

4. *Besides chairs of philosophy in all faculties, special chairs in "the philosophy of each faculty" should be created.*

The students of the different faculties should have a general knowledge of philosophy, as suggested earlier. This need could be met by instituting chairs of philosophy in the different faculties. As an intermediary step, one could institute compulsory papers on philosophy for the students of all faculties, under the responsibility of the Department of Philosophy.

Besides this, special emphasis should be laid on the intellectual unity of a particular faculty, and its integration into the general pattern not only of knowledge but also of life. Medical doctors, lawyers, historians, and engineers, to give just a few examples, should have not only a general knowledge of the philosophical problems of our times, but also be familiar with the anthropological and philosophical foundations of their respective disciplines. A general theory of the medical sciences, which by definition can only be philosophical, is as necessary as the mastering of a particular medical technique. Philosophy is not only cross-cultural, it is also essentially interdisciplinary.

Not only is accurate preparation of the curricula and syllabi needed; the personnel and problems themselves must be prepared, for we are now entering an extremely important new area. For once, philosophy in India could take the lead!

5. *The title "Ph.D." should be upgraded and become an exceptional qualification.*

A new degree could be created, if the "old" Ph.D. were still to be required. One cause of the low esteem in which philosophy in India today is held is the generally poor quality of university students, and consequently of staff (brilliant exceptions notwithstanding). This can only be remedied by revalorizing the title, and then the philosophical courses of philosophy.

6. *The creation of an All-India Institute, or Academy, of Philosophy.*

The example of other countries may be stimulating and enlightening. India has first-class national institutions for arts and sciences, law and medicine, but, in spite of the Indic

philosophical tradition, it has no corresponding Indian Academy of Philosophy, which could play a consultative role for many social bodies in the country, including the state. (One might add, incidentally, that some genuinely philosophical thinking would do no harm to the studies and disquisitions of the Supreme Court and other higher courts of law.) Isn't India too closely following classical foreign models, in spite of the fact that elsewhere these very institutions are now being considered in need of radical reforms?

For far too long now, even after the sciences had overcome this stage, philosophers have been believing that their philosophical speculation is a highly individualistic affair. This does not need to be the case. To be sure, the genius is always an exception and cannot be foreseen or produced, and certainly thinking requires solitude and concentration (like in the sciences, as well), but this does not exclude the communitarian and collaborating character of philosophy. The many traditional schools of the past witness that a proper climate, a tradition, and a two-way communication are required.

The function of such an academy could be to encourage teamwork and common reflection on fundamental issues, as well as to coordinate philosophical activities at the highest level. It should not become a "think-tank" in the service of vested interests or political power, but should embody the philosophical awareness of the people, and contribute to enhancing the quality of the spiritual and intellectual life of the community.

7. Emphasis should be given to the areas of special relevance and to cross-cultural studies, also providing more or less institutionalized opportunities for fruitful philosophical dialogues and interactions.

Without encroaching upon philosophical freedom, many ways of fostering the above-mentioned goals could be found: Prizes, seminars, summer schools, guidelines for Ph.D. theses, etc. These activities go beyond the competence of Departments of Philosophy, which in any case should not have a monopoly on the cultivation of philosophy.

8. Indian philosophers could take the lead in promoting the publication of a history of philosophy on a human scale that would overcome national and cultural, as well as religious boundaries.

The *History of Philosophy, East and West*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan, could serve as an example here. This project should not be a mere juxtaposition of essays, nor follow historical and geographical divisions, but cut across times and places, and present the main philosophical problems as they have been seen, suffered, and solved by the human race across all boundaries. Being in itself a difficult philosophical task, this very activity could help the creation of the body needed to realize it. Needless to say, the project, although directed from somewhere, should be truly universal and not only Indian, perhaps in cooperation with the UNESCO.

9. A handbook on the fundamental terms of Indic tradition may help to give consciousness, identity, and perspective to the bewildering variety and richness of the philosophies of India.

For two years now the writer has been studying the feasibility of such a project, which has then been shelved until a proper agency takes the financial and administrative burden.

10. Today, many worldwide thinkers are searching for an alternative to "modern" culture.

Indian philosophy should enter this quest and see whether it can contribute to the discovery of a viable alternative. A common project could be set up.

I have presented a draft to UNESCO, calling for a symposium involving the different philosophies of the world in order to agree on the diagnosis, in case, before proceeding to the therapy.

Some Axioms

- The vitality of Indian philosophy today depends on the vitality of today's Indian philosophers.
- The vitality of Indian philosophers today depends on their taking their role as thinkers seriously in a wider context.
- The effectiveness of their thinking will depend on such factors as (a) how deeply they are rooted in the Indic tradition, (b) how much they are familiar with Western culture, and (c) how sincerely they are engaged in the modern struggle for a more humane world.

THE CHALLENGE OF MODERNITY

Perhaps there was too much of religion in one sense; the word is English, smacks too much of things external such as creeds, rites, an external piety; there is no one Indian equivalent. But if we give rather to "religion" the sense of the following of the spiritual impulse in its fullness and define "spirituality" as the attempt to know and live in the highest self, the divine, the all-embracing unity, and to raise life in all its parts to the divinest possible values, then it is evident that there was not too much of religion, but rather too little of it—and in that there was a too one-sided and therefore insufficiently ample tendency. The right remedy is not to belittle still farther the age-long ideal of India, but to return to its old amplitude and give it a still wider scope, to make in very truth all the life of the nation a religion in this high spiritual sense.

—Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950),
The Foundations of Indian Culture

I perceive India going steadily downhill.¹ This is not necessarily pessimism, for, after touching the bottom, we may rebounded to new heights. India is headed in the wrong direction. By sheer inertia, the country follows the direction of the colonial past, continued more or less unconsciously by the elites. It is the direction given by that European movement which pompously called itself the "Enlightenment." I speak of the overall direction and not of the many positive reforms and values of the *Aufklärung*. But India is not Europe.

Here are some basic issues. I will only mention some fundamental *sūtras*.

Modern India is the nation-state. Any other meaning of the word "India" is today an abstraction. Abstraction is the great method of modern science. Science abstracts from reality: first, the phenomenon; second, the mathematical underlying structure; and third, from this sub-structure it again abstracts the quantifiable data. We are hardly aware of how much the modern scientific method has conditioned our thinking.

But India, I maintain, is its people. Yet people are not the sheer individuals nor the living only: the ancestors also are part of this people. Further, which people? The illiterate? The adivasis, the Muslims, the Hindūs, the secularized inhabitants of the big cities? What have all these people in common so as to let us find one single concept that encompasses all of them? In common there are bodies with their different needs, minds with their peculiar thoughts, individuals with their personal rights, peoples with their diverse histories. If India is the sum of its people, in order to get any sum we must previously homogenize the

¹ The text dates back to 1993. These overcondensed pages reflect some of the ideas elaborated in *Indra's Divine Cunning: The Challenge of Modernity—The Indian Experiment*, Chapter 1 of this Section.

elements: single individuals (with only accidental differences). In fact, India boasts of being the largest democracy in the world, meaning by that the largest number of individuals. An *adivasi* friend told me that he could understand the concept of "one rupee, one vote," but not "one man, one vote." Can India be only a numerical abstraction?

When asked about the way in which we perceive India, the sensible answer is to focus on the nation-state. We have not been asked about Hinduism or the tribal *cosmologies*,² or the economic standard of the people, nor about the "Indian culture" of Muslims, for instance. India is certainly an administrative political unity. More than this, the notion of India yields no definite contents. Many *adivasis* do not consider themselves as Indians, nor do many *Dalits*, nor many cosmopolitan "citizens of the world," not to speak of some people in Kashmir, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, etc. The only unambiguous thing is that modern India is a nation-state. This is all. I am neither contesting nor defending its legitimacy. I am only ascertaining a fact.

I do not feel qualified to give a detailed evaluation of its day-to-day policies. I may only say that on the whole, in spite of the so-called criminalization of politics (which I assume is not altogether false), in comparison with many other countries, Indian politics are alive, dynamic, full of initiatives, and following a more or less democratic pattern. We are not a dictatorship, nor a theocracy, notwithstanding political tendencies in this direction. In spite of many negative features, India is a strong nation-state. It is one of the few nation-states having nuclear power, and official India is so proud about it that it keeps its options open, refusing to join the nonproliferation treaty.

"Nation-state" is an important but alien notion. India is a state that gathers, comprises, protects, dominates, represents a group of nations, some of them recognized as states within the Indian Union, some unrecognized. India is not a nation but a bundle of nations, naturally or unnaturally brought together under the one single state. My submission on this second point is this: India as a nation-state has no bright future. And I may add that not even new "partitions" into smaller nation-states would have any chances of creating a political order capable of offering an under-structure for the well-being of the peoples of the subcontinent.

I may formulate the *metaphysical* reason for it—without apologies for the use of the word, and with excuses to those who are allergic to it. The reason is that the very concept of nation-state is not a chemically pure and supra-cultural notion, applicable to all historical and cultural circumstances, but a cultural concept ingrained in a particular culture, and within a given cosmological myth. In other words, the theory and the praxis of a nation-state is intrinsically related to what (oversimplifying) we may call the modern Western culture, and in no way congenial to the different cultures of the peoples of the subcontinent. This is why the attritions of the nation-state with the people are much stronger here than in those places in which people are still conscious that a "minister" means a servant—to put it briefly.

There is a rupture between the traditional cultures of this country and the present-day ideological set-up. In other words, each culture (if it is really culture and not simply folklore) secretes its own political system. It may be that the traditional cultures were already dead; or perhaps because they were oppressed, they were unable to establish their own political

² I distinguish between kosmology and cosmology. Kosmology is not a rational doctrine about the world but the primal awareness of how the cosmos discloses itself to us when we open ourselves to its self-manifestations. Cosmology is our *logos* about the cosmos, the doctrine our reason elaborates for an "objective" worldview. The former is at the basis of the latter; it is the underlying *mythos* about which our *logos* speculates. Their relation is a-dualist.

systems, or they were simply superseded, overrun, or stifled. We would probably find actual cases for all these possibilities. The fact is that a culture without its own political order hardly deserves the name of culture. This is why we have in India the peculiar phenomenon of utilizing culture as a means to strengthen the Republic—which, tellingly enough, is the policy of dictatorial regimes, although in India this is not attained with dictatorial means.

I repeat: Culture is formed by the collective horizon by which a historical group perceives reality; it is the all-encompassing myth at a given time of a given people. If culture is not submitted to a higher pressure—that is to say, if it is independent—it will create institutions for its political life, in spite of any possible parallelisms and interferences. In sum, the political world is a cultural construct, and one of its most important manifestations. Nation-states are collective individuals—and here also, theoretically, “one State, one vote” or “one dollar, one vote.” This leads to an excruciating but unavoidable dilemma, as follows.

Either the ideology of the modern nation-state removes all the cultures of India in order to establish the culture congruent with the nation-state ideology, or the autochthonous cultures of India dismantle the present functioning of the nation-state organization. Nobody can serve two masters.³ This dilemma, I submit, is latent in most dealings of the people of India with their government, and may be a cause for the much trumpeted corruption of Indian politics. The people of this country are neither better nor worse than the average peoples in the rest of the world.

If a system needs so much oil to function properly, it may be that the machinery being used is not the proper one for that country. The moment the people awaken to this fact, we will have—in much major proportions—what has been witnessed in contemporary Italy: parallel forms of government and submerged economies, because an Anglo-Saxon system has been superimposed onto a Latin mentality. What would be unthinkable in Britain is not only thought but put into practice in Italy. Since the peoples of India are still too dazzled, submissive, not self-confident, too fearful, or respectful, we have not yet reached the incoming anarchy. These theoretical reflections therefore may be of the utmost practical relevance.

The present nation-state justifies itself by affirming that the values it represents are neutral, universal, and thus supra-cultural. In other words, the justification for the establishment of the “sovereign, secular, socialistic, democratic republic” that we “adopt, enact and give to ourselves,” as is affirmed in the preamble of the Constitution of 1949 (with the amendments: “secular, socialistic” after the “emergency” of 1975–77), lies in the belief that these values are universal, supra-cultural, and thus applicable, without any kind of violence, to the different peoples of India.

I do not see any shadow of ill will in this. The drafters of the Constitution were not hankering for power. This was, and still is, the prevalent myth of the elites, the inheritance of the “Enlightenment.” It is another facet of the myth of progress. India was believed to be, politically at least, in a “primitive” stage, so it should overcome feudalism and petty kingdoms, and reach the mature stage of a democratic republic. There is no discontinuity but linear progress: this is what is believed.

May I point out, with some degree of irony, that the Western archetype of “one God, one empire, one church, one civilization” has now turned into “one world democracy, one world market (and bank), one science, one technology”? If in past times they believed that “outside the church there is no salvation,” now it is held that *extra scientiam nulla salus*. The irony is

³ Mt 6:24.

that, while the church has no longer any power, the technocratic complex is all-powerful. Such is the dominion of the technological world that, if we do not accept the status quo, we may eventually starve or disappear from the map. Difficulties combine: India's *karman* is interconnected (*pratityasamutpāda*) with the situation of the world, but it is anyway something peculiar. *Karman* is not fatalism. To look for realistic solutions does not mean to follow the stream blindly. Just the opposite. True realism goes against the stream (*ūrdhvasrotas*).

The belief in the linear evolution of humankind, sustained by social Darwinism and corroborated by the triumphs of modern science, forces the nation-state, and all those abiding by this ideology, to be competitive and victorious for the survival of the fittest. This is the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, the war of all against all, predicted by one of the fathers of modernity, Thomas Hobbes.

In a closed material system, if one side grows, the other will diminish; in a saturated market, constant increase amounts to cancer; in a world market, if every nation has to export more than what it imports, where is the principle of noncontradiction? Competitiveness (as distinct from emulation) is a euphemism for war.

The astounding achievements of modern science have been interpreted, or rather felt, as the confirmation of the universality of the Western model. After so many centuries of branding the other worldviews as unscientific and mythical, modern India has uncritically subscribed to the belief in the universality of the findings of modern science. We have absolved Western scientific cosmology—believing that now, at last, we know everything about matter, the universe, the genes, and so on, and reacting against an unconfessed complex of inferiority because the “great” Indic civilizations proved incapable of such definitive discoveries. At least, those *paṇḍits* who believe that during the *Mahābhārata* times Bhishma had a TV screen (otherwise, how could he describe such complex battles so well?) do not yield to the deleterious belief that the ancient culture was inferior.

This is the reason why modern India is almost obsessed with science and technology. They are considered to be definitive gains for the human race, in the unawareness that modern science is the Trojan Horse that will simply destroy the entire building of traditional India. The conceptions of time, space, matter, and energy (not to say of life, world, and reality) underlying modern science are at loggerheads with the traditional concepts of classical India. The latter “will have” to be substituted by those modern notions learned in Indian universities. Official India is developing a messianic syndrome: scientific education is the new messiah. One can understand certain reactions of orthodox Hinduism, independently of political exploitations. The concern is real.

The colonialism of the mind is more subtle and pervasive than military or political colonialism. Official India is not culturally independent: it has accepted, and perhaps absorbed, an exogenous culture, believing that it is universal and superior. And by saying this, I am not contesting the stupendous achievements of modern mathematics or science in general. I am only saying that we should not extrapolate value judgments outside their proper contexts.

The Indic archetypes submerged in the psyche of the people are still powerful enough to bring about a transformation. While a certain middle class is burgeoning by cashing in on the opportunities of the electronic boom, the ordinary people are disoriented, to say the least. The intellectuals are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems, afraid of being called utopian and unrealistic, if I can make an oversimplified statement. By and large, there is a malaise among the intellectuals, not to call it an unhappy consciousness (the Hegelian

unglückliches Bewusstsein), which generally does not dare to express itself without hesitations, nuances, and provisos but which, more or less consciously, sympathizes with the general trend of my theses—with qualifications and corrections, of course.

The firm conviction of the founding fathers of the Indian Republic is no longer there. They were hesitant about many things; the problems were enormous, but they sincerely believed that *independence* from Britain meant *equality* with Britain, that is, becoming another Britain, or France, or North America, for that matter. Today, Indian intellectuals are uncomfortable, and dig into the issue of the identity of the peoples of India.

Until now, India *had* problems; now India begins to *be* a problem. This is why the central question is not met by mere technical solutions, but consists in facing the very problem of self-identity. One fears a collective alienation. And in fact, the ordinary people feel alienated in their own country. They do not speak the same idiom, not even the same language. For all its advantages, English is, after all, a language that, despite its enormous efforts at breaking its British shell (thanks to the United States, mainly), is still uncongenial to many, and only used by some 10 percent of the world's population. Yet the majority of scientific publications are in English.

Quaestio mihi factus sum,⁴ said a man of genius who also suffered the temptations of a religious and a political schizophrenia: Augustine, the African and yet proud citizen of the Roman Empire. We Indians also are a question to ourselves. We wonder who we are: Westerners transplanted into a tropical soil? Colonialists of our own country? Mavericks of the ruling powers? "Who am I?" was the liberating *koan* of Ramana Maharshi, echoing a long *upanishadic* tradition: *ko ham?* This presents us with another alarming dilemma.

The separation between religion and politics is lethal, and their identification suicidal. Official India seems to be caught in between—not just now, after Ayodhya, but since its Independence. Both words need to be understood in their deepest and, at the same time, widest sense: religion as the human dimension that confronts Man with the ultimate sense of life, and politics as the human theoretical-practical activity dealing with the *polis*, the communitarian aspect of humanity.

I perceive India as the land that has probably formulated in the most insightful way one of the central queries the human spirit faces when it tries to approach the mystery of Reality: the *advaitic* intuition, the insight that reality is *advaya*, not-two, but also not-one, and therefore that no mind, not even an infinite mind, can encompass reality in a single vision. Perhaps the very lightening of this experience led some Indic thinkers, not resisting the tension of this polarity, to advocate an idealistic philosophy denying reality to the world. It is not the place here to defend that *advaita* is not monism, or to pursue this line of reflection now. It suffices to say that some Indic cultures have the tools to overcome that dilemma precisely because the dichotomy between the "natural" and the "supernatural" (in spite of the *vedāntic pāramārthika* and *vyāvahārika*, which, of course, can be given an a-dualist interpretation) does not exist in most Indic cultures. This is why we need to learn from, and respect, the so-called tribals of India, which may be perhaps the cultural (and spiritual) reservoir for the transformation of the whole country.

I must refrain from elaborating further on about this. Let us just say that religion without politics is lame, and politics without religion is blind. A disembodied religion is pure ideology. A mere "neutral" and aseptic form of politics (a-religious politics) would mean a mere technical brooding over the means, without any critical awareness of what the ends are.

⁴ "I have become a question to myself."

The karman of the Indic subcontinent has the very nature of pluralism. The entire history of the Indic subcontinent can hardly be reduced to a common denominator. The land of India is not a "melting pot." Everybody cooks one's own food and another's food in different pots. To be a mosaic of cultures or religions is not yet pluralism, but is anyway a sign that pluralism is congenial to the Indic psyche. *Pluralism* is more than a sheer *plurality*, which we perhaps tolerate because we cannot assimilate it into our own way. It is more than a coexistence between different people, leaving my neighbors undisturbed, provided they do not disturb me. It is more than *syādvāda* and *bhedābheda*, although all these phenomena point in that direction. Even the caste system could be theoretically interpreted as an unsuccessful, and later tragic, effort in that direction—beyond the more immediate historical causes that have given birth to it. Each caste is a universe irreducible to the other. The tragic failure lies in the fact of interpreting diversity by means of *logos*. The *logos* will then look for a religious justification that will introduce a hierarchical order leading to a concentration of power, and abuse of it, immediately afterward.

Pluralism belongs to the order of the *mythos* and not of the *logos*. Logical or philosophical systems may be incompatible, yet they share in the very mythical awareness of that incompatibility. Systems, peoples, ideas, nations may be worlds apart, and yet they belong together in a way that is not reducible to intelligibility. Anyway, pluralism is not kaleidoscopic anarchy or unrelated monads. Everything is related; only, the relation is of another order. We pay heavily here the price of a patriarchal attitude: the predominance of reason.

Pluralism is the experience that all of us are contingent (and thus no absolutism is justified), and that the very nature of reality is relativistic (from "relativity," not from "relativism"). This universal relatedness keeps the middle way between a lethal isolationism and a stifling uniformity; or putting it more philosophically, between dualisms of all kinds and monisms of all sorts. Reality is polar, and therefore not reducible to one pole.

The peoples of India have not reached unity, and yet they are not fully separated. The past millennia have prepared Indic cultures for a special task today. This is the *karman* we have in mind. The world is in danger of succumbing to the bulldozer of a technocratic homogenization. The victims are already there. The history of the land of India up to our times shows that no empire has succeeded in bringing such uniformity (under the name of unity or integration). We do not have—and do not want—one language, one religion, one culture, one nation. It is apparently easier to unify a country than to patiently maintain an always moving (provisional) pluralism. The crowds of Gods and Goddesses, ridiculed by so many Indologists, are perhaps still active in preserving India's *karman* for the benefit of the world. For this task, wisdom is required. Wisdom consists in transforming dialectical tensions into creative polarities.

These are discomfiting words, practically impossible to translate into praxis, it may be retorted. Truly enough! But, besides the fact that not only the Gods, but also Man, and even Nature love the "theoretically impossible," and that creativity is always a breakthrough, the alternative is still more upsetting: greater chaos, increased suffering, and unimaginable destruction, not for India alone, but for the entire world. In fact, many of our analyses apply not exclusively to India but to a great part of humanity. And this increases the responsibility of the Indic subcontinent. Have not the *yajña*, rightly understood, since the *Vedic* times, and the *lokasamgraha* since the time of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, been the *karmayoga* of the peoples of this country?

But we should not go back to times gone by. If traditional religions have only imperfectly fulfilled their *dharma*, perhaps because they were entrenched in their ghettos, prisoners of their own narcissisms, or perchance because the time was not yet ripe for a next step, it is

incumbent to our generations to set the wheel of *dharma* in another direction. The human predicament has become intolerable precisely because we have become more conscious of it on a global scale, and find unconvincing the up-to-now common religious justifications of human inequalities and oppressions.

We live in a whirlwind. This whirlwind may release a *vāyu*, *pneuma*, spirit, which, if courageously sailed, may lead humankind to new adventures, more joyful and peaceful. Why should we accept uncritically that Man, except for exceptions, is a wretched animal, when we hear from many corners that he is even superior to the Gods? Is it not true that modern Man, who lives on much higher standards than in old times, seems to have lost the *joie de vivre*? We labor much more and celebrate much less, we are anguished by time and need to accelerate it. India's *karman* had another rhythm, which is now disrupted. We have inherited a heavy *karman*, but not less momentous is the burden of the hour. Anything less than a positive response to our responsibility would be a betrayal of our humanness.

GLOSSARY

All terms are Sanskrit unless otherwise specified.

Abhyudaya: earthly pleasure, material prosperity.

Acāpala: perseverance; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Ramayana*.

acara: rules, codes of conduct, teaching.

ācārya: teacher of *Veda*, spiritual guide who imparts initiation. The term is anterior to *guru*.

adharma: injustice.

adhidaiva: refers to the supreme divinity of manifestation; the suprasensible aspect of universal manifestation as presided over by the gods Indra, Varuna, etc.

adhikāra: disciple, aspirant qualified for initiation.

adhyātma: the supreme Self (*paramātman*); the primary or primordial Self; the inner Self of all beings.)

ādivāsi: first inhabitants of the Indic subcontinent.

advaita: a-dualism (*a-dvaita*). Spiritual intuition that sees ultimate reality as neither monistic nor dualistic. The recognition that the merely quantitative problem of the one and the many in dialectical reasoning does not apply to the realm of ultimate reality. The latter, in fact, possesses polarities which cannot be divided into multiple separate units; not to be confused with monism.

Āgama: literally "arrival," "come," from *ā-gam* [to come]. Name given to a group of traditional texts having an authority similar to that of the *Vedas*.

Agni: the sacrificial fire and the Divine Fire, one of the most important Gods or divine manifestations, the mediator or priest for Men and Gods.

ahaituka: disinterested, without reason, without cause, spontaneously.

aham: "I," first person pronoun. *Aham* as ontological principle of existence is generally distinguished from *ahamkāra* as a psychological principle.

ahamkāra: the sense of the *ego*.

ahiṃsā: "non-violence," respect for life, not killing and not wounding, not desiring to carry out violence against reality. A moral and philosophical principle based on ultimate universal harmony. The root *hiṃs-* from *han-* means "to wound," "to kill." This is not exactly a Vedic notion—it appears only a few times in the *Upaniṣad*; it was developed in Jainism and Buddhism.

ajapa-mantra: recitation without formula [*japa*, *mantra*].

ākāśa: air, sky, space, ether, the fifth of the primordial elements (*mahābhūtāni*), which is the element of sound. It is all-pervading and infinite and, therefore, often identified with Brahman.

akṛtsna: partial or imperfect knowledge.

aletheia: truth

amarṣitva: ability to feel indignation; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyana*.

amṛtatva: immortality.

ānanda: joy, bliss (cf. *sukha*), the delights of love, and especially the highest spiritual bliss; *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* represent three possible attempts at defining *brahman* or absolute reality.

anēr: (Greek) man, male

angelia: (Greek) message (angelic)

aṇīman: derives from *aṇu*, atom; "atomicity," the thinnest; root.

Antaryāmin: the inner guide; in the *Upaniṣads* it is the *ātman*, conceived as an inner presence and guide of all beings.

anubhava: direct experience, knowledge deriving from immediate spiritual intuition.

anugraha: divine grace

ap: water, one of the five elements (*bhūta*).

apāna: one of the five breaths (vital breaths, cf. *prāṇa*), the breath which descends, which controls excretion.

aparā: imperfect, inferior (the opposite of *parā*).

apauruṣeya: "of non-human origin." The traditional view of the Vedic interpretation is that the *Vedas* are not composed by human authors, but are the manifestation of the "eternal word" (*vāc*).

apauruṣeya (*apauruṣeyatva*): "not of human origin," without *puruṣa*. The traditional view of the Vedic interpretation is that the *Vedas* are not composed by human authors, but are the manifestation or revelation of the "eternal word" (cf. *vāc*), although the inspired *ṛṣi* are tools of revelation. In the beginning was the Word: *vāc*.

apohah: exclusion, negation; understanding of the reasons contrary to learning; one of the virtues of intelligence, according to the *Rāmāyana*.

apunarāvṛtti: without return.

Āraṇyaka: name given to a group of writings from the *Vedas* on meditation and the purification of the mind.

arcā: image, visible and material manifestation.

arcanā: worship and honoring of the Lord; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

Artha: purpose, effort, work, aim, also prosperity, health, value and power, i.e. the material goals of human activity. One of the four *puruṣārtha* or aims of human activity [*-dharma*, *-kāma*, *-mokṣa*].

Artha-sāstra: treatise illustrating the different means both for gaining wealth (mechanical arts) and obtaining the management of the common good (political and economic).

arthavijñāna: intuition of what has been learned; one of the faculties of intelligence, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Ārya Samāj: religious-political movement of the nineteenth-century Hindū Renaissance.

āsana: a series of different positions of the body, according to the various yoga schools.

asat: non-being; denial of being; as opposed to *sat*, being.

askeo: (Greek) to toil, to model; therefore, to practise, to exercise.

asparśayoga: yoga without intermediary, without mental content, stopping of the mind, "non-mind."

āśrama: state of life, the four traditional periods in the life of the "twice-born": student (*brahmacārin*), head of family (*grhastha*), inhabitant of the forest (*vānaprastha*) and itinerant ascetic (*saṃnyasin*). Also the hermitage of a monk and, therefore, the title of an ascetic. Also indicates a spiritual community, generally under the direction of a *guru* or spiritual teacher. Also refers to a stage in human life.

Atharva-veda: the fourth story of the *Vedas*; Wisdom expressed in magical texts.

ātman: principle of life, breath, the body, the Self (from the root *an*, to breathe). Refers to the whole, undivided person and also to the innermost center of man, his incorruptible nucleus, which in the *Upaniṣad* is shown to be identical to Brahman. The Self or inner essence of the universe and man. Ontological center in Hinduism, which is negated in Buddhism.

ātmanātma-vastuviveka: discernment between real and unreal.

ātmanivedana: offering up of oneself to the Godhead, devotion of the whole being to the Lord; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

ātmaprāṇa-pratīṣṭhā: exercise for concentration (*pratiṣṭhā*) in breathing (*prāṇāyama*).

atyāśrama: the state beyond the four traditional states of a man's spiritual being (cf. *āśrama*), which transcends them in complete spiritual freedom.

Aum: cf. Om.

avatāra: "descent" of the divine (from *ava-tṛ*, descend), the "incarnations" of Viṣṇu in various animal and human forms. Traditionally, there are ten *avatāra*: *matsya* (the fish), *kūrma* (the tortoise), *varāha* (the wild boar), *narasiṃha* (the lion-man), *vāmana* (the dwarf), Paraśurama (Rama with the axe), Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalkin at the end of time. In general, any personal manifestation of the Divinity, descended into this world in human form; descent as antonomasia.

avidyā: ignorance, nescience, absence of true and liberating knowledge, often identified with *māyā* and a cause of illusion and delusion.

avisamvāditā: consistency; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

avyakta: unmanifested.

azomai: (Greek) to worship, to honor.

Bhagavad-gītā: The "Song of the Glorious Lord," the "Song of the Sublime One," a famous ancient Indian didactic poem included in the *Mahābhārata* (often called the "New Testament of Hinduism"), the most well-known sacred book in India.

Bhagavān (*Bhagavat*): "blessed, adorable, glorious, venerable Lord," a term used both for holy men and Gods.

bhāgavatism: one of the religious currents of *viṣṇuism*.

bhakta: officiant, devotee, he who follows the path of love for God and is completely submitted to the divine (cf. *bhakti*).

bhakti: devotion, submission, love for God, personal relationship with God, devotional mysticism. One of the paths of salvation through union with the divinity.

bhakti-mārga: the path of love and devotion, one of the three classical spiritual paths (cf. *karma-mārga*, *jñāna-mārga*).

bhakti-yoga: method for attaining fulfilment through love and worship.

bhāṣya: commentary.

bhāva: from the root *bhū* [to exist, to become]: existence, emotion, temperament; human states [*·paśu*, *·vira*, *·divya*]. May be correctly translated as "nature" [*·vibhāva*].

bheda: sharp-wittedness, the spreading of discord among enemies; one of the four abilities for winning in the struggle for life, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

bhoga: pleasure, delight, enjoyment.

bhūta: bodiless or immaterial being, angel, spirit; element of nature.

Bhūta-śāstra: treatise on the elements (*śāstra*).

biazetai: (Greek) effort, violence.

bija: seed, germ, sperm, grain for sowing; therefore, origin, support and truth. Certain letters (or syllables) expressing the essence of a real Godhead; sacred syllable.

bios (Greek): existence, biological life, length of life.

brahmacarya: life of a student of Brahman, also of the chastity and education of Brahman. The first of the four *āśrama* (cf. *grhastha*, *vānaprastha*, *saṁnyasa*).

brahma-jijñāsā: noun deriving from the desiderative of the root *jñā* [to know]. [*jñana*]: the desire to know *brahman*, longing for the realisation of *brahman*.

brahma-loka: the world of *brahman*, heaven, transitory state.

brahman: the Absolute, the ultimate reason underlying all things; in the *Upaniṣad* it is identified with the immanent Self (*ātman*). Also, one of the four priests who perform the sacrifice or the clergy in general.

brāhmaṇa: priest, brahman, member of the priestly class; being pure, knowing Brahman. Also a collection of writings added to the *Samhitā*, which deal with ritual and mythical subjects.

brahmanism: term that came to be used to denote the continuation of the religiosity of the *Vedas* when the caste of the brahmanas was ritualized; name by which Hinduism came to be known in the West.

Brahma-sūtra: traditional Hindū text; one of the bases of the Vedānta.

brahma-vidyā: wisdom or knowledge of *brahman*; sacred science, theology.

brāhmī-sthiti: final, divine state or divinization.

Brāhmo Samāj: reform movement of the nineteenth century, which professed to make Hindū religiosity more accessible to the european mentality.

buddhakāya: lit. "body of Buddha," universal solidarity, the behavior of the Buddha.

buddhi: the highest faculty of the intellect, also comprehension, thought, meditation.

Buddhism: religious movement born of the figure and the predication of Gautama Buddha, in the sixth century B.C.

Cārvāka: materialist school within Hinduism originating from the indic philosopher Carvaka (circa sixth century B.C.).

cit: root noun (from the root *cit-*, to perceive, to comprehend, etc.), meaning "consciousness, intelligence." One of the three "characteristics" of Brahman (cf. *sat*, *ānanda*).

citta: the mind as an organ of thought, the working mind (cf. also *manas*).

daivāsūram: [struggle] between *deva* (good divinities) and *asura* (bad divinities).

dāksya: uprightness; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

dalit (hindi, from sanskrit *dalita*): oppressed, crushed. Name that marginalized groups give themselves in India.

dama: control of the senses, self-control, asceticism; one of the virtues obtained through *jñāna*.

dāna: generosity (in giving to others); one of the four abilities in the struggle of life, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*; one of the religious precepts or duties assigned mainly to the head of the family.

daṇḍa: literally pole, stick, strength; one of the four abilities in the struggle of life, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

dārdhya: stability; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

darśana: from the root *drś*, to see, to observe, hence vision, sight; philosophy, *Weltanschauung*. In a religious context it means the vision of a saint or God, hence also meeting, audience, visit.

dāsyā: life consecrated to the service of the Lord, the service of a servant to his master; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

deśakārajñā: opportunity (sense of time and place); one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

devanāgarī: the writing of the Gods, the character with which Sanskrit is generally written.

Devatā: Godhead

deva-yajña: sacrifice by the Gods to the Gods.

dhamma (pāli): cf. *dharma*.

dhāraṇā: meditational concentration.

dhāraṇa: memory of what has been learned; one of the virtues of intelligence, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

dharma: cosmic order, justice, duty, religious law, religious and social observances transmitted by tradition; "religion" as a collection of practices and laws. That which holds the world together. One of the four "human purposes" (cf. *puruṣārtha*).

dharmakāya: mystical body of *dharma* in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

dharmakṣetra: the field of *dharma* fulfillment, i.e. the field of human action. The world is *dharmakṣetra*, the battleground of the moral struggle (*Bhagavad-gītā*, 1).

dharma-samanvaya: harmonization, convergence, the meeting of all *dharma*s.

Dharma-sāstra: treatises quintessentially constituting the *smṛti*, they deal with the concrete application of the Vedic teachings in the various spheres of human activity.

Dhikr [*zeker*] (Arabic): literally memory, evocation. Refers to the permanent memory of God through repetition of one of his names [cf. *mantra*].

dhyāna: meditation, contemplation.

dīkṣā: initiation; the preliminary rites; consecration of one who performs the sacrifice, such as that celebrated, for example, at the beginning of the *soma* and leads to a "new birth." Out of the context of sacrifice *dīkṣā* is the initiation of the disciple by the *guru* into *saṃnyāsa*, the life of the errant monk.

divya: divine state; one of the three states (*bhāva*) of human beings [*paśu*, *·vīra*].

dravya: substance, category; in the *Vedas* material support of sacrifice.

duḥkha: dis-quieted, un-easy, distress, pain, suffering, anguish (lit. "having a poor axle hole," i.e. that which does not turn smoothly), a basic concept in Buddhism and Hinduism. Opposite of *sukha*.

duḥkha-nivṛtti: end of suffering.

Durgā: "difficult to access"; "the inaccessible." One of the most ancient names of the Divine Mother, consort of Śiva.

dvandva: pair of opposites, e.g. cold and heat, pleasure and pain (cf. *nirdvandva*).

dvandvātita: state that lies beyond every kind of dualism.

dvāpara: the third of the four *yugas* [*·kṛta*, *·tretā*, *·kali*].

dvija: one who is born a second time into the life of the spirit, the initiated.

dvitīya: second, "secondborn."

ekam: one; generally the primordial oneness, the origin of all, later identified with Brahman.

ekam advitīyam: One without second.

ekānta: devotion to one single object, worship of one single Being; the characteristics of "pure love" when the mind of the *bhakta* is concentrated on the Beloved.

ekānta-dharma: one of the currents of viṣṇuism that emphasises the aspect of pursuing one single purpose.

ekāntika: literally, devoted to one single purpose, with one sole aim; name of a current of viṣṇuism.

ekibhūta: “unification” of experience.

epektasis (Greek): dilatation, expansion, extension; man’s trust in his divine destiny, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa. Hope.

epiphaneia (Greek): manifestation.

epistēmē (Greek): science.

ergon: (Greek) energy.

garbha: embryo, interior, womb.

garbha-grha: the central and most sacred part of the temple.

gauṇa (i): secondary.

gignomai: (Greek) to be born, to come into being.

gopī: shepherdess full of love and devotion for Kṛṣṇa; symbol of the soul united with the divine being.

grahaṇa: capacity to understand what is said; one of the faculties of intelligence, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

grhasṭha: the state of head of family, the married man, the second of the four *āśrama*.

guṇa: the three qualities or attributes of being: *tamas*, darkness; *rajas*, desire; *sattva*, being.

guru: cf. *ācārya*; usually refers to one who has attained fulfillment.

gurukula: school of a teacher (*guru*) for the young in the first stage of life (*brahmacarya*).

haituka (i): having interested motives.

Hari: literally “he who wards off or drives away (evil)”; saint. Name of God in the form of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, later indicating the personal God.

harijan: literally “children of God,” the name given by Mahatma Gandhi to the Untouchable caste (*dalit*).

haṭha-yoga: *yoga* technique practised for the purpose of achieving a certain control of the body through specific psychophysical exercises that also help draw the attention away from external objects.

hetu: usually translated as “cause”; may also be taken to mean reason, inference, driving force, motive, etc., as did Aristotle and the post-scholastics.

hindutva: nationalistic reaction of militant Hinduism, which was revived in the late twentieth century.

homa: sacrificial rite to the Gods made with fire.

humanum (Latin): the basic human; that which is specific to all humanity.

idam: "this," singular neuter form of the demonstrative pronoun. Generally means "this [universe]." *Idam sarvam*: all this, this all, the visible universe. *Idam* is "this" purpose of all intentionality and experience, differing from *tat* as the "other," the transcendent purpose.

Indra: the great divine warrior who wins all battles in favour of his worshippers, both against opposing clans (*dāsyu* or *dāsa*) and against demons such as Vṛtra and Vala. His virile power is irresistible and is the *soma* that provides him with the energy needed for his mighty exploits. He is the liberator of the compelling forces; he releases the waters and the light. His weapon is the *vajra*, the lightning bolt.

indriyāṇi: senses, sensory perceptions.

Īśa: God, the Master, the Controller; refers also to the idea of possession and dominion. *Īśvara*, the Lord, comes from the same root *īś*, "to be the master."

Īśa-vāsyam: penetrated and scented by God (*Īśa*), inscribed and enclosed in him, covered by him.

iṣṭadevatā (*iṣṭadeva*): the tangible symbol of the divine, the personal form of God, in worship and meditation; the icon of the divine that best corresponds to the culture, idiosyncrasy and circumstances of each person or group; the concrete symbol through which the ultimate mystery is experienced.

Īśvara: the Lord, from the root *īś*-, to be lord, to guide, to possess. Although a generic term for Lord, in posterior religious systems it is more often used for Śiva than for Viṣṇu. In the Vedānta it is the manifested, qualified (*saguṇa*) aspect of Brahman.

itihāsa: literally "so indeed it was" (*iti ha āsa*). Story, narration, "historical tradition," epic (cf. the two great epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*).

jainism: religious movement that dates back to Pārśvanātha, a spiritual teacher of the 8th Century before Christ, crystallized, in the sixth century B.C., around Mahāvīra.

japa: silent or murmured repetition of sacred formulas (*mantra*) or the names of God as a spiritual exercise. Praying is generally done with the aid of a rosary (*mālā*).

jīva: living being (from *jīv*-, to live); the soul in its individuality, as opposed to *ātman*, the universal soul. There are as many *jīva* as individual living beings.

jñāna: knowledge (from the root *jñā*-, to know), intuition, wisdom; frequently the highest intuitive comprehension, the attaining of *ātman* or *brahman*. *Jñāna* is the result of meditation or revelation. Cf. *jñāna-mārga*.

jñāna-kāṇḍa: section of the *Vedas* containing the teachings that lead to "fulfillment."

jñāna-mārga: the path of knowledge, contemplation and intuitive vision; one of the three classic paths of spiritual experience, generally considered superior to those of *karman* and *bhakti*, although many *bhakta* regard *jñāna* as merely as form of *bhakti*.

jñāna-yoga: technique for attaining realization through knowledge.

Jñanesvarī: commentary on the *Gītā* written by the great marathi mystic of the thirteenth century, Jñānadeva.

kairos (Greek): time, opportune moment, crucial point at which the destiny changes phase, epoch.

kaivalya: isolation, solitude, detachment; one of the spiritual states of supreme freedom.

kali: the last and most degenerate of the four *yugas*, the current age. [*·kṛta*, *·tretā*, *·dvāpara*]

kalokagathía (Greek): honorability, blameless conduct, virtue.

kalón (Greek): beautiful, noble, honest.

kalpa: a period of the world, a cosmic time of variable length.

Kalpa-sūtra: collection of manuals containing aphorisms on rules to follow in Vedic sacrifices and ceremonies.

kāma: the creative power of desire, personified as the God of love; one of the *puruṣārtha*.

kāṇḍa: section, division, chapter.

kārikā: mnemonic strophe, doctrinal study in verse.

Karma-kāṇḍa: section of the *Vedas* describing rituals.

karma-mārga: the path of action; one of the three classic paths of spirituality (cf. *bhakti*, *jñāna*). In the *Vedas* it refers to sacrificial actions viewed as the way to salvation; later includes also moral actions, or all actions that are performed in a spirit of sacrifice.

karman: lit. "act, work, action," from the root *kr*, "to act, to do"; originally meaning the sacred action, sacrifice, ritual, later also the moral act. The result of all actions and works according to the law of karma which governs all actions and their results in the universe. Its subsequent association with rebirth refers to the link between a person's actions and his destiny in the cycle of deaths and rebirths.

karma-yoga: method for attaining fulfillment through action.

karuṇā: comprehension and compassion; an important concept in Buddhism.

kathā-japa: sacred narration.

kathākālī: Malabar dance.

kavi: poet, ṛṣi.

keśin: "long-haired (*keśa*)," he who has long hair, ascetic, monk.

kīrtana: chant glorifying the name of the Lord; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

kleśa: affliction, impurity of the soul.

koinōnia (Greek): community, communion.

kosmos (Greek): order, the ordered universe, the wholeness of the world.

kriyā: religious activity, act.

kriyā-yoga: the practical form of *yoga*, i.e. the use of specific and general means to attain fulfillment.

Kṛṣṇa: *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (literally "black"); one of the most popular Gods. It is he who reveals the *Gītā*. He is the divine child and the shepherd God, the incarnation of love and the joyful God *par excellence*.

kṛta: the golden age. The first of the four *yugas*, also known as *satya* [*·tṛetā*; *·dvāpara*; *·kali*].

kṛtajñatā: gratitude (for favors received); one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

kṛtsna: total, perfect knowledge.

kṣatriya: member of the second caste (*varṇa*), which includes kings, warriors and aristocrats (cf. *brāhmaṇa*, *·vaiśya*, *·śūdra*).

kṣetra: "field," both in a metaphorical and literal sense. Knowledge begins with the distinction between the field and he who knows the field, i.e. between the world (as the object) and the knowing subject.

Kulārṇava-tantra: one of the *tantras*.

kurukṣetra: the battlefield where the war of the *Mahābhārata* was fought and where Kṛṣṇa revealed the *Bhagavad-gītā* to Arjuna.

Lakṣmī: identified since the earliest times with Śrī and later associated with Viṣṇu as his power and glory as well as his consort; subsequently, as his *śakti*, identified with other manifestations of the Godhead, such as the Great Mother.

laos: people, nation, population, multitude.

laukika: natural, worldly, temporal.

līlā: divine game, the world as the amusement of God. This concept is not Vedic but Purāṇic.

liṅga: characteristic feature of Śiva; phallus.

liṅgāyata: one of the śivaitic philosophical currents of southern India.

loka: "world," open space, place, kingdom. Cf. *triloka*.

lokasaṁgraha: the "keeping together, maintaining of the world" by the wise man and the saint through the sacred or liturgical action (concept of *Bhagavad-gītā*).

madhya: wine.

Mahābhārata: epic poem that tells the legendary story of the Indian people and expounds its prescriptive values.

Mahādeva: Supreme God, appellative of Viṣṇu.

mahā-purāṇa: great *purāṇas*, of which, according to tradition, there are eighteen.

mahātma: "great soul." Name of the founder of the Jain religion (fourth-fifth century B.C.).

mahāvākya: "great saying." Refers to great expressions of the *Upaniṣad* that express very concisely the content of the experience of the Absolute.

maithuna, *mīthuna*: union, mating, copulation both in a sexual and metaphorical sense.

māṁsā: flesh

manas: mind in its broadest sense, heart, intellect, the internal organ that is the seat of thought, comprehension, feeling, imagination and will. In *Upaniṣadic* anthropology *manas* is one of the three constituent principles of man (cf. *vāc*, *prāṇā*).

- mānava-dharma-śāstra*: the most complete law code in India, highly authoritative for its attribution to *Manu*—the reason for which this *śāstra* is also known as *Manu-smṛti*.
- maṇḍala*: lit. “circle.” Mystic representation of all reality; a pictorial illustration of the homology between the microcosm (*man*) and the macrocosm (the universe). Also a book of the *Rg-veda* (a “circle” of hymns). The *Rg-veda* is made up of ten *maṇḍala*.
- manīṣin*: the thinker, the intellectual.
- mantra*: prayer, sacred formula (from the root *man-*, to think), sacred word, a Vedic text or verse. Usually only the part of the *Veda* consisting of the *Samhitā* is called a *mantra*. As it is a word of power it may also take the meaning of magic formula or spell.
- mantra-vīrya*: power of the *mantra*, in which the ultimate Self is the subject.
- Manu*: the father of humanity, the man *par excellence*; also the first priest to establish sacrifices.
- Manu-smṛti* or *Manava-dharma-śāstra*: Book of the Laws of Manu.
- mārga*: road, path, way.
- matsya*: fish
- māyā* (sancsr.): the mysterious power, wisdom, or ability of the Gods, hence the power of deceit, of illusion. In the Vedānta it is used as a synonym of ignorance and also to indicate the cosmic “illusion” that shrouds the absolute Brahman.
- māyāvāda*: doctrine of the *advaita-vedānta* according to which the world is only *maya*, i.e. irreality, illusion.
- meletē* (Greek): attention, concentration, meditation.
- menō* (Greek): to remain, to last or, originally, to think.
- metanoia* (Greek): transformation, change of mentality or heart, conversion; going beyond (*meta*) the mental or rational (*nous*).
- metexis* (Greek): participation
- methodos* (Greek): path, method, process.
- mīmāṃsā*, *mīmāṃsaka*: one of the six classic systems of Indian philosophy which deals mainly with the rudiments and the rules for interpreting the Vedic writings. From the root *man-*, to think. The two main schools are the *pūrvamīmāṃsā*, which focuses on the ritual interpretation of the *Veda* (cf. *karmakāṇḍin*) and the *uttaramīmāṃsā*, which gives a philosophical and spiritual interpretation.
- Mīmāṃsā-śāstra*: exegetical treatises.
- mimēsis* (Greek) imitation
- mohāvataāra*: false divine manifestation.
- mokṣa*: ultimate liberation from *saṃsāra*, the cycle of births and deaths, and from *karman*, ignorance and limitation: salvation. Homeomorphic equivalent of *sōteria*.
- mūdrā*: literally “seal.” A gesture both of the body and the hand, it is the preparation for the liturgical ceremony and represents the more or less necessary condition

for the effectiveness of the act. There are different types of *mudrā*, ranging from hand gestures to yogic positions and actions (*kriya*). Symbolizes the participation of our body in the act of salvation.

mukti: salvation, liberation.

mūla: root, origin, cause.

mumukṣutva: desiderative form of the root *muc-* (cf. *mokṣa*); desire for salvation, and yearning for liberation, the necessary prerequisite for embarking on the path of liberation.

mūrti: solid form, body, hence incarnation, person, figure, statue, image. Mainly used for the sacred images of Gods. The *Veda* do not describe any cult of the image (*pūjā*), which is a development posterior to Hinduism.

naiṣkarmya: innocent action; abandonment of the action, inactivity or action free of desire, of the fruit.

naiyāyika: followers of the *nyāya* system, supporters of the theory of the human origin of sacred texts (*pauruṣeya*, as opposed to *apauruṣeya*).

nāma (*naman*) name

nāma-japa: the prayer of the name (of God); repetition of the divine name (cf. *japa*).

nāma-rūpa: "name and form," the phenomenic world that constitutes the *saṃsāra*.

Nārāyaṇa: the "son of Man" (*nara*), i.e. the original *puruṣa*; one of the names of Viṣṇu.

nāstika: non-theist, atheist position or person.

Naṭarāja: "king of the dance," dancing figure of Śiva.

nembutsu (Japanese): recitation of the name of Buddha Amitābha. It's the exercise of the school of "Pure Land," that can take to the higher aim: the reborn in Paradise or Pure Land of Amitābha.

neti neti: "not this, not this" (*na iti*), i.e. the negation of any kind of characterization of the *ātman* or *brahman* in the *Upaniṣad*; pure apophatism.

nigama: texts of exegetical interpretation.

niḥśreyasa: spiritual bliss as "fulfillment."

nirdvandva: composed of *dvandva* and *nis*, *niḥ*, *nir* (negative or privative particle).

Overcoming of all the *dvandva*, the pairs of opposites. In Sanskrit literature *nirdvandva* often means "indifferent to dilemmas," "indifferent to alternatives."

nirguṇa: absolute, without *guṇa*.

nirhetu (*nirhetuka*): unconditioned, causeless. (*Skt.*): *Unconditional, without cause.*

nirvāṇa: lit. "the going out (of the flame)," extinction. The word does not refer to a condition, but indicates liberation from all dichotomy and conditioning, whether it be birth and death, time and space, being and non-being, ignorance and knowledge, or final extinction including time, space and being; the ultimate destination for Buddhism and Jainism.

nirvikalpa-samādhi: absorption into the ultimate reality without loss of self-awareness [*-samādhi*, *-savikalpa-samādhi*].

nistraiguṇyatā: overcoming of the three *guṇas*.

nitya: the eternal, permanent, real.

nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka: discernment between permanent (eternal) and temporal things.

nivṛtti: composed of *vṛt* [to turn, to change] and *ni* [retreat, back]. Could literally be translated as "involution." Cessation, negation of all activity; path of renunciation of all action [cf. *pravṛtti*].

noema (Greek): in the phenomenology of Husserl the unit of intellectual perception.

nyāsa: purification, consecration; ritual projection of the Godhead or his grace onto Man, tangibly through physical contact as a channel for real impregnation.

Om: the sacred syllable, formed by three letters A-U-M. Also means "yes," "so be it" (*amen*). Used also at the beginning and end of every recitation of sacred writings and is believed to have a mystic meaning. The highest and most comprehensive symbol of Hindū spirituality, which is also used as a *mantra* in Buddhism. Manifestation of spiritual energy, which indicates the presence of the Absolute in the world of appearance.

ontonomy: intrinsic connection of an entity in relation to the totality of Being, the constitutive order (*nomos*) of every being as Being (*on*), harmony that allows the interdependence of all things.

ousia (Greek): to be, substance.

pāda: foot

pāda-sevana: service to the Lord, literally "to serve his feet"; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

pañca: five

pañca-kṛtya: the five cosmic actions of Śiva, through which he manifests his supreme power: emanation, maintenance, destruction, withdrawal and liberation.

pañca-makāra: system of the five "m"s; the five methods used refer to five objects whose name in Sanskrit begins with *m*.

pañca-makāra-pūjā: tantric ritual applied in the use of the five "m"s.

pañcarātra: literally "of the five nights," a current of *viṣṇuism*.

pañḍit: erudite.

parama-puruṣātha: the supreme value *par excellence*, the *summum bonum* to which the human being aspires.

pāramārthika: ultimate level, ultimate reality, true reality.

para(ma)-vyoman: "supreme reality," the ultimate realm of freedom; also the "place" where the mystery is hidden.

Pārvatī: "she of the mountains," the Divine Mother, one of the names of the bride of Śiva.

pāśa: chains and nooses by which the animal-man is still bound.

paśu: animal state, or soul chained to this world; one of the three states (*bāhva*) of Man [cf. *vīra*, *diuṃya*].

pāśupata: form of religious belief that later came to be identified with Śivaism. The purpose is the liberation of the animal soul (*paśu*) from the chains binding it to this world (*pāśa*), through the master (*pati*), Śiva.

pati: lord, master, applied also to God.

pauruṣeya: of human origin, a theory supporting the human origin of the sacred texts.

phala: fruit.

pisteuma (Greek): from *pisteuō*, to believe; that which the believer believes, the intentional sense of religious phenomena, the homeomorphic equivalent of *noema*.

prabhāva: origin, source, cause of existence.

prādurbhāva: manifestation, apparition of a deity without affecting its transcendence.

Prajāpati: "Lord of creatures," the primordial God, Father of the Gods and all beings. His position is central in the *Brāhmaṇa*.

prajayā: offspring, lineage.

prajñā: understanding and awareness, consciousness, wisdom. Cf. *gnōsis*, *jñāna*.

prakṛti: nature, raw material; in the Sāṃkhya one of the two fundamental principles of the universe (cf. *puruṣa*).

pramāṇa: means for attaining valid knowledge.

prāṇa: vital breath, life, the breath of life, the vital force that holds the body together. In the *Upaniṣad* one of the three constitutive principles of the human being (cf. *vāc*, *manas*). It is made up of five types of breath (*prāṇa*, *apāna*, *vyāna*, *samāna*, *udāna*). The cosmic equivalent of *prāṇa* is *Vāyu*, air, wind.

prāṇāyāma: breathing exercise; from *prāṇa* [breathing] and *āyāma* [to hold]: control of breathing rhythm.

prapañcopaśama: composed of *upaśama*, meaning "to cease" (from *upa* and the root *śam* [calm, pacification, tranquillity, peace]) and *prapañca* (from *pra* and the root *pañc*: from *pac* [to cook, to mature]). The cessation of all manifestation, development, evolution.

prātibhāsika: illusionary knowledge, a category of the *advaita-vedānta*.

pratiṣṭhā: foundation, support, base.

pravṛtti: composed of *vṛt* [to turn, to change] and *pra* [active particle: in a forward direction]. Could literally be translated as "evolution." The way of positive and effective action, the path of works as a way to salvation [*niṣṛtti*].

preman: love, love of God.

prthivī: earth; in the *Veda* it is usually mentioned together with *dyaus*, sky. Venerated as the mother of all living beings.

pūjā: worship, reverence, adoration. The concept is more closely related to the *bhakti* cult than the Vedic cult.

Purāṇa: ancient history, narrative, myth; a class of literature incorporating Hindū mythology.

Puruṣa: the Person, the spirit, man. Both the primordial man of the cosmic dimension (*R̥g-veda*) and the "inner man," the spiritual person existing within man (*Upaniṣad*). In the Sāṃkhya it is the spiritual principle of reality (cf. *prakṛti*).

puruṣārtha: the purpose or goal of human life. Indian tradition speaks of four such values: *kāma*, *artha*, *dharma* and *mokṣa*. The ultimate purpose, however, is *mokṣa*.

rajas: activity, agitation, effort, strength capable of overcoming inertia; the active principle in humans. In the Sāṃkhya one of the three *guṇas* [*sattva*, *tamas*].

rājasūya: great sacrifice. Vedic rite created for the consecration of a king.

Rāma: *avātara* of Viṣṇu and one of the most popular of the Vedic Gods. Son of Daśaratha and husband of Sītā, Rāma is a model of uprightness and the great hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Rāmāyaṇa: Indian epic poem.

R̥g-veda: the most ancient and important of the *Veda* texts.

ṛṣi: seer, sage, wise man; the poet-sages to whom the *Vedas* were revealed. Regarded as a special class of beings, superior to men and inferior to the Gods. According to one tradition there were seven *ṛṣi*, probably the seven priests with whom Manu performed the first sacrifice and the seven poet judges in the assembly. Their identification with the names of ancient seers and with the stars of the Ursa Major occurred later (*Brāhmaṇa*).

ṛta: cosmic and sacred order, sacrifice as a universal law, also truth; the ultimate, dynamic and harmonious structure of reality.

ṛtvij: he who makes sacrifice at the proper time, the officiating priest.

Rudra: Vedic God whose name derives from *rud-*, "to scream, to howl." This is the terrible God of storms, father of the class of Gods named Rudra and of the Marut. Closely related to Indra and Agni. Later became one of the manifestations of Śiva.

sa: he, him (personal pronoun).

śabda: sound, word. An aspect of Brahman as the revealed, the manifested (cf. *śabda-brahman*).

śaḍaṅga-nyāsa: localisation or projection of the Godhead through contact of the fingers with the six parts of the body, i.e. the heart, the skullcap, the chest, the three eyes and the hand.

sadguru or *satguru*: eternal teacher, teacher archetype, universal *guru*.

sādhaka: one who practises a spiritual, yoga discipline.

sādhana: spiritual practice or discipline.

sādhv: straight, leading straight to the goal, good, just. A good person, renunciant, monk or ascetic.

saguna: relative, not absolute, defined as *guṇa*.

śaivasiddhānta: religion, philosophical/religious school pertaining to Hinduism; dominant Śivaism in Tamil Nadu.

sakhya: activities of the disciple and friend of the Lord; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in “imperfect devotion” that are needed in order to achieve pure love.

śakti: energy, potency, divine power, the creative energy of God. The active, dynamic—feminine—aspect of reality or of a God (generally of Śiva). Personified as the goddess Śakti, consort of Śiva with a creative function.

śaktijñatā: awareness of one’s capacities (and those of others); one of the fourteen “excellencies,” according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

śaktipāta: descent of divine power.

śaktism: one of the three great religious currents of India, along with *viṣṇuism* and śivaism.

sāma: from the root *sā* [acquisition, possession, abundance]: the ability of persuasion and reconciliation, one of the four abilities in the struggle of life, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

śama: calm, tranquillity, method of mental appeasement.

samādhāna: mental concentration, attention, seriousness; one of the virtues preceding *gnosis*.

samādhi: state of deep concentration, compenetration, immersion, perfection (enstasy); the last of the yoga stages; also the tomb of a saint.

samāna: one of the four vital breaths (*prāṇa*) [*apāna*, *vyāna*, *udāna*].

Sāma-veda: the second collection of the *Vedas*; wisdom expressed in chants.

sambhavāmi: “I am born, I return to contingent existence” (expression from the *Gītā* in relation to the theology of the *avatāra*).

Samhitā: the first part of the *Vedas*.

sāṃkhya: literally, the “enumeration, numbering” of philosophical principles. One of the six traditional philosophical schools (*darśana*), the philosophy on which *yoga* is based.

saṃnyāsa: renunciation, the fourth stage of life spent as an errant monk (from *saṃnyās*, to suppress, to renounce, to abandon).

saṃnyāsin: renunciant, ascetic; pertaining to the fourth stage or period of life (*āśrama*), to some the superior stage.

sampradāya: tradition, religious system and community that follows a tradition.

Samprasāda: perfect, peaceful, serene (from *sam* [unitedly, with] and the root *sad* [to sit])

saṃrambha-yoga: path to God through hostility towards the Supreme Being.

saṃsāra: the impermanent phenomenic world and the condition of identification with it, the temporal existence, the cycle of births and deaths, of conditioned existences; state of dependence and slavery.

saṃskāra: “sacrament,” rites that sanctify the various important stages and events in human life. Also karmic residues, physical impressions left over from previous lives, which in some way influence the individual existence of a person.

saṃskṛta: integrated, packaged, composed, configured.

Sanātana-dharma: "law, eternal, imperishable religion," the name that Hinduism gives itself on the grounds of having neither founder nor temporal origin; the self-understanding of traditional religiousness in India.

sandhyā: "intermediate state" (from *saṃ* [prefix] and *dhā* [to place, to put together]). The three sacred times of the day (dawn, midday, dusk).

Śaṅkara: eighth century Hindū philosopher and teacher; one of the most famous exponents of non-dualist Vedānta.

śānti: peace, tranquillity, quiescence. The closing *mantra* of many prayers and oblations.

śaraṇāgatavātsalya: magnanimity towards fugitives (immigrants); one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Sarasvatī: name of a sacred river; later became the name of the Goddess of knowledge and teaching, the sacred word and music.

sarva-bhūteṣu gūḍham: hidden in all beings.

sarvajña: omniscient

sarvakleśasahiṣṇutā: courage (to bear mishaps), forbearance; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Sarvaviññānitā: knowledge of all things; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

śāstra: precepts, orders, rules, authoritative teachings; body of traditionally authorised texts.

sat: essence (pres. part. of *as-*, to be), existence, reality. Ultimately, only the Brahman is *sat*, as pure Being is the Foundation of all existence. In the Vedānta one of the three "qualifications" of the Brahman (cf. *cit*, *ānanda*).

Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa: "*Brāhmaṇa* of one hundred paths," the most complete and systematic of the *Brāhmaṇa*.

sat-mārga: one of the four traditional paths of śivaism.

sattva: essence, reality ("that which is"), goodness, purity; in man the illuminating principle. In *sāṃkhya* one of the three *guṇas* [*rajas*, *tamas*].

sāttvata: a current of *viśiṣṭuism*.

satya: true, truth, reality, "that which is" objectively and subjectively.

satyāgraha: active non-violence of those who live for the truth.

satyasamkalpaḥ: literally "having attained reality"; when referred to *brahman* may be translated as "whose intentions are fulfilled," "whose intellectual structure is reality."

satyasya satyam: true truth, true reality, the being of the existent.

saurya: heroism; one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

savikalpa-samādhi: absorption into the ultimate reality without loss of self-awareness [*·samādhi*, *·nirvikalpa-samādhi*].

Savitṛ: lit. vivifier, arouser, inspirer (from the root *su-*). Vedic divinity associated with

the sun as a stimulating, motive power, sometimes identified with the sun. He who is invoked in the *mantra* Gāyatrī, known, therefore, also as Sāvitrī.

Sāvitrī: the stanza in the *Rg-veda* that refers to Savitṛ; the *mantra* Gayatrī (*Rg-veda* III,62,10).

savṛta-mantratā: discretion (safeguarding of); one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the Rāmāyana.

siddha: perfect, full, complete.

siddhi: perfection, perfect capacity or faculty. Psychic powers that may appear as a by-product of spiritual development.

Śipivṣṭa: "clothed in rays of light," one of the names of Viṣṇu.

śiṣya: disciple (cf. *guru*).

Sitz im Leben (German): vital setting, context.

Śiva: propitious, gracious, pleasant, benevolent. He who is of good omen; in the *Veda* it is Rudra who is known to the *Śvetāśvatara-upaniṣad* as Śiva, one of the most important Gods of Hindū tradition. He is the destroyer of the universe (cf. also *Brahma*, *Viṣṇu*), and also the great *yogin* and model of ascetics. His consort is Parvatī or Umā.

Śivaism, *Śivaita*: one of the two great families of the Hindū religion, whose God is Śiva.

śivaliṅga: symbol of Śiva [cf. *liṅga*].

śiva-tantra: group of religious texts from the śivaitic currents [*agama*].

skambha: cosmic pillar, the stable and invisible support of the universe.

smaraṇa: loving consideration, grateful memory of the Lord; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

smṛti: lit. recollection, memory. Tradition; the scriptures that follow *śruti*, such as epics (*itihāsa*), the books of the law (*dharma-sāstra*), etc., less authoritative than *śruti* itself, on which they are based.

soma: the sacrificial plant from which the juice of the *soma* is extracted through elaborate rituals, hence the sap or drink of immortality (*amṛta* is another name for *soma*); a divinity ("Soma the king"). *Soma* was used ritually for entering a higher state of consciousness. Later it also took on the meaning of "moon."

sōteria (Greek): salvation, liberation, redemption.

śraddhā: "faith," the active trust (in Gods or in the rite itself) required in every act of worship; confidence (in the teachings of the *Veda*). In the *Rg-veda* (x,151) *śraddhā* is invoked almost as a divinity.

śravaṇa: "hearing, listening"; the ability to hear or to receive the teaching from the lips of the teachers. Listening in the *Veda* is the first of the three levels that the Vedānta considers necessary for attaining spiritual knowledge.

śrī: splendour, brilliance, glory, beauty, pre-eminence; used as a title for Gods, saints and respected persons; the consort of Viṣṇu.

śruti: "that which has been heard," the Vedic Revelation, an expression mainly used

in sacred texts, *Veda* and other authoritative Hindū scriptures, which reveal to the human spirit the entire *corpus* of the *Veda* transmitted orally.

stotra: prayers of praise, including in litany form.

śūdra: member of the fourth class (*varṇa*), whose task is to serve the other three [cf. *brahman*, *ksatriya*, *vaiśya*].

sukha: happiness, pleasure, joy, bliss.

sukhaprāpti: obtain pleasure, achieve happiness.

Śunaḥśepa: son of Ajigarta, believed to be the poet of the *Rg-veda* hymns I, 24-30 and IX, 3. His famous story represents one of the myths on the human condition.

śūnya, *śunyata*: void, vacuity, nothingness, the structural condition of reality and all things; represents the ultimate reality in Buddhism (cf. *nirvāṇa*).

śuśrūṣā: predisposition to listening (to others); one of the virtues of intelligence, according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

suṣupti: deep, dreamless sleep, one of the four states of consciousness, along with wakefulness, dreaming and the state of conscious enlightenment.

sūtra: lit. "yarn, thread of a fabric." Short aphorism in a sacred text that generally cannot be understood without a comment (*bhāṣya*). The literature of the *sūtra* is part of the *smṛti* and is conceived to be easily memorised.

svābhāvika: natural.

svadharma: intrinsic personal order, suited to one's own situation, caste, religion, etc.

svarga: literally "that which leads to the light"; world of light, heaven, the highest of the three worlds, the home of the Gods.

taijasa: derivative of *tejas*: bright. The second quarter or second foot of *brahman*. The ideal world or subtle world [*vaiśvānara*, *prajñā*, *turiya*].

tamas: powers of darkness, the inertia of matter; the dark and inert appearance of Man. In *sāṃkhya* one of the three *guṇas* [*sattva*, *rajas*].

tāṇḍava: ecstatic dance performed by "demons" on the body of a rebel demon.

taṇhā (pāli): thirst; thirst for existence; origin of all suffering, according to Buddhism. Cf. *trṣṇā*.

Tantra: lit. weave, weaving, loom; religious system not based on the *Veda*, consisting in secret doctrines and practices which give access to hidden powers; accentuates the inter-relation between body and soul, matter and spirit; the development of special powers. The tantric tradition has practically permeated the entire spiritual tradition of Asia. The basic assumption of all tantric practices is the inter-relation between body and spirit, matter and soul, *bhukti* (pleasure) and *mukti* (liberation).

tapas: lit. heat; hence inner energy, spiritual fervor or ardor, austerity, asceticism, penitence. One of the forms of primordial energy, along with *kāma*.

Tarka-sāstra: dialectical treatises.

tat: demonstrative pronoun: "that." Opposite of *idam* (this), refers to Brahman. When isolated, it refers to the ultimate reality without naming it.

tat tvam asi: "that is you," an Upaniṣadic expression meaning that *ātman* is ultimately Brahman. One of the four Great Sayings (*mahāvākyani*) of the *Upaniṣad*, as taught to Śvetaketu.

theandric: "divine-human" (from Greek *theos* and *aner*).

technē (Greek): art, ability, handicraft.

teinō (Greek): to tend, to direct, to explain.

tempiternity: non-separation between time and eternity.

theōreia (Greek): theory; originally in the sense of "contemplation."

titikṣā: patience, strength in suffering hardships and affliction; one of the virtues preceding *jñāna*.

transcendentals: by transcendentals we mean those "properties" inherent to every being as Being, i.e. One, True, Good, Beautiful, which reflect the cosmic trust of the human being, who must in some way express his critical attitude towards life.

tretā: the second of the four *yugas* [*kṛta*, *dvāpara*, *kali*].

triloka: the "triple world," totality of the universe, consisting in three realms: earth, atmosphere and sky, or earth, sky and the nether regions (later called hell); the inhabitants of the three worlds are Gods, men and demons.

trimūrti: the divine triade of Hinduism, composed of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

Trivarga: three values, states or categories.

tṛṣṇā: thirst; cf. *taṇhā*.

turiya: the fourth foot of *brahman*, the last quarter; the state of pure transcendence, which is reached only through self-annihilation [*vaiśvānara*, *taijasa*, *prajñā*].

tvam: you (personal pronoun, second person singular).

tyāga: renunciation, abandonment of possessions and attachments.

udāna: one of the four vital breaths (*prāṇa*) [*apāna*, *samāna*, *vyāna*].

ūha: understanding of the positive aspects of what is learned; one of the virtues of intelligence, according to the Rāmāyaṇa.

upādhi: addition, adherence; all that overlaps and can be eliminated; illusionary adherences that become attached to Being.

upanayana: deriving from *upa-ni* [to bring near to oneself]: ceremony of initiation and investiture of the sacred thread. The initiation corresponds to a second birth; consequently, initiates are called "twice-born" (*dvija*).

Upaniṣad: fundamental sacred teaching in the form of texts constituting the end of the *Veda*; part of the revelation (*śruti*) and basis of posterior Hindū thought.

upa-purāṇa: secondary *purāṇas* [*mahā-purāṇa*].

uparati: renunciation, indifference (including good and lawful acts); one of the virtues preceding *gnosis*.

upsāna-kāṇḍa: part of the *Vedas* that deals with meditation and the purification of the mind, which is developed more explicitly in the *Āraṇyaka*.

upāya: means, method.

upeya: the goal, the purpose.

ūrja: ardour (courage, enthusiasm); one of the fourteen "excellencies," according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

vāc: word; the sacred, primordial and creative Word; sound, also discourse, language, the organ of speech, voice. Sometimes only the *Ṛg-veda* and other times all the *Veda* are referred to as *vāc*.

vaiśvānara: the first quarter or foot of *brahman*; consists in the visible dimension of the common Man, whose sphere of action (whose world) is the waking state; this is the universal Man, considered both in his highest acceptance, and identified therefore with Agni, and in the sense of representing that which all humans have in common [cf. *taijasa*, *·prajñā*, *·turīya*].

vaiśya: member of the third caste (*varṇa*), that of farmers and merchants [*·brahmin*, *·kṣatriya*, *·śūdra*].

vajra: the legendary weapon of Indra; thunder, lightning, ray, diamond.

vana: forest

vānaprastha: inhabitant of the forest, hermit; the third stage of life or *āśrama*, when the head of family withdraws into solitude, with or without his wife, after having fulfilled his earthly duties.

vandana: salutation and glorification of the Lord; one of the nine characteristics of divine love in "imperfect devotion" that are needed to attain pure love.

varṇa: caste, color.

varṇāśrama-dharma: the order or duty of each caste.

Varuṇa: one of the main Gods of the *Veda*; Varuṇa is king, commander and supervisor of the moral conduct of men. He is Lord of *rta*, cosmic and moral order. He is often invoked together with Mitra. Due to his close association with water he later became known simply as a God of water, the Lord of the ocean.

vastu: thing

Vasu: lit. good, benevolent. Name of a class of Vedic Gods (usually eight in number) led by Indra.

vāyu: air, wind, personified as a God in the *Veda*.

Veda: lit. knowledge (from the root *vid-*, to know); the sacred knowledge incorporated in the *Veda* as the entire body of "Sacred Scriptures" (although originally they were only passed on orally). Strictly speaking, "*Veda*" refers only to the *Samhitā* (*Ṛg-veda*, *Yajur-veda*, *Sāma-veda*, *Atharva-veda*); generally, however, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad* are also included. In the plural it refers to the four *Veda*.

vedanā: sensation, feeling.

vedāṅga: auxiliary discipline of the *Vedas* (being in a sense part of the same), as a hermeneutic means.

Vedānta: lit. end of the *Veda*, i.e. the *Upaniṣad* as the climax of Vedic wisdom. In the sense of Uttaramī māṃsa or Vedāntavāda, a system of Indian philosophy (advaita-vedanta, dvaita-vedanta, etc.) based on the *Upaniṣad*, which teaches a spiritual interpretation of the *Veda*; one of the last schools of Hindū philosophical thought, of which the most renowned representatives include Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva.

vibhāva: composed of *bhāva* [nature] and *vi*, determinative particle; *vibhāva* is the natural manifestation of God, God who descends into "nature"; the physical and historical descent of God.

vidyā: knowledge, wisdom, also branch of knowledge; a section of a text in the *Upaniṣad*.

vijarā: timeless river.

vijñāna: knowledge gained from experience, critical knowledge.

vīra: heroic state; one of the three states (*bhāva*) of Man [*·paśu*, *·divya*].

virāga: independence, detachment, renunciation.

virāḍātman: the totality of physical bodies; corresponds on a cosmic level to *vaiśvānara*.

viśiṣṭādvaita: *advaita* school of personalistic character, founded by Rāmānuja.

Viṣṇu: important God in Hinduism, featured in the ancient *Veda*; his name means "the all-pervading one." Associated with the sun, he is famous for his three great strides with which he measured the three worlds. He later became the second component of the *trimūrti*, the preserver, and is mainly worshipped in his *avatāra* (cf. *Kṛṣṇa*, *Rāma*).

viṣṇuism: one of the three great religious currents of India, along with śivaism and śaktism.

viśvakarman: the universal constructive principle, referring to *Prajāpati*, Lord of produced beings.

viveka: discernment, discrimination.

vyāna: one of the four vital breaths (*prāṇa*) [*·apāna*, *·samāna*, *·udāna*].

vyāvahārika: "relating to earthly matters, to mundane life," i.e. the earthly way of seeing, the practical perspective; the relative level.

vyoman: sky, atmosphere, aerial space.

vyūha: grouping, distribution; one of the five forms of God, according to the *viṣṇu*ite tantras.

wuwei (chin.): "non-action" in Taoist philosophy.

yajamāna: offerer participating in vedic sacrifice.

yajña: from the root *yaj* [to offer]: sacrifice, worship. Central concept and practice in the *Vedas*. The three elements are the sacrificial substance (*dravya*), the

deity to which it is directed (*devatā*) and the act of surrender or renunciation (*tyāga*). Those involved are the sacrificer (*yajamāna*), his wife and the four main priests (*ṛtvij*).

Yajur-veda: the third collection of *Vedas*; Wisdom expressed in liturgical formulas. Divided into *Black*, the most ancient, heterogeneous and “unordered,” and *White*, the most modern and “ordered.”

yakṣa: spiritual, semi-divine, supernatural being; beings belonging to a higher level than the physical.

Yama: the “twin” of Yamī, the first man and the first to pass through death and obtain immortality; hence the predecessor of men on the path of death and he who commands in the realm of the dead. Later became the personification of Death and the Lord of the nether regions.

yāmala: tantric texts.

yantra: from the root *yam* [instrument]: design made up of geometrical shapes; a symbolic diagram representing the divine, its energies and aspects.

yantra-tattva: yantric microcosm, which contains all the categories of reality, the *tattva*.

yoga: from the root *yuj-*, to yoke, to join, to unite, to prepare, to fix, to concentrate; union, method of mental, physical and spiritual union, concentration and contemplation, which also uses bodily posture (*āsana*), breathing control (*prāṇāyāma*) and spiritual techniques. Yoga appears to be an extremely ancient Indian practice that was developed into a system by Patañjali (*Yoga-sūtra*) and made to correspond to the philosophical system Sāṃkhya. Yoga as a method has become a fundamental factor in practically all religions of Indian origin.

yogin: the ascetic, one who practises self-control, a follower of the path of yoga.

yonī: female reproductive organ, womb, hence also home, place of rest; also the support or inner part of all things.

yuga: generation, period. Each of the cosmic ages that are repeated in the same order: *kṛta* (or *satya*), *tretā*, *dvāpara* and *kali* (the present age, the degenerate age). This order presupposes a gradual and progressive decline of moral and human life.

zoē (Greek): Life, that which allows something to have life [*bios*].

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¹ Saving exceptions, the Spanish edition (if existing) and the most recent one found. When the complete reference does not appear, or the text contains references to specific pages of a prior edition, data is simply added from the latest edition. Different authors' orthography of Sanskrit terms has been acknowledged, although they may not coincide with those adopted in this book.

² There are countless editions of sacred books. We only quote some of the most representative ones and easiest ones to find in Spanish. The complete references may be consulted in the General Bibliography.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An international authority on spirituality, the study of religions, and intercultural dialogue, Raimon Panikkar has made intercultural and dialogical pluralism one of the hallmarks of his research, becoming a master “bridge builder,” tireless in the promotion of dialogue between Western culture and the great Oriental Hindū and Buddhist traditions.

Born in 1918 in Barcelona of a Spanish Catholic mother and an Indian Hindū father, he is part of a plurality of traditions: Indian and European, Hindū and Christian, scientific and humanistic.

Panikkar holds degrees in chemistry, philosophy, and theology, and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1946. He has delivered courses and lectures in major European, Indian, and American universities.

A member of the International Institute of Philosophy (Paris), of the permanent Tribunal of the Peoples (Rome), and of the UNESCO Commission for intercultural dialogue, he has also founded various philosophical journals and intercultural study centers. He has held conferences in each of the five continents (including the renowned Gifford Lectures in 1988–1989 on “Trinity and Atheism”).

Panikkar has received international recognitions including honorary doctorates from the University of the Balearic Islands in 1997, the University of Tübingen in 2004, Urbino in 2005, and Girona in 2008, as well as prizes ranging from the “Premio Menéndez Pelayo de Humanidades” for his book *El concepto de naturaleza* in Madrid in 1946 to the “Premio Nonino 2001 a un maestro del nostro tempo” in Italy.

Since 1982 he has lived in Taverter in the Catalanian mountains, where he continues his contemplative experience and cultural activities. There he founded and presides over the intercultural study center Vivarium. Panikkar has published more than fifty books in various languages and hundreds of articles on the philosophy of religion, theology, the philosophy of science, metaphysics, and Indology.

From the dialogue between religions to the peaceful cohabitation of peoples; from reflections on the future of the technological society to major work on political and social intelligence; from the recognition that all interreligious dialogue is based on an intrareligious dialogue to the promotion of open knowledge of other religions, of which he is a mediator; from his penetrating analysis of the crisis in spirituality to the practice of meditation and the rediscovery of his monastic identity; from the invitation of *colligite fragmenta* as a path toward the integration of reality to the proposal of a new innocence, Panikkar embodies a personal journey of fulfillment.

Among his most important publications with Orbis are: *Velo della realtà* (2000); *L'incontro indispensabile: dialogo delle religioni* (2001); *Pace e interculturalità. Una riflessione filosofica* (2002, 2006); *La realtà cosmoteandrica. Dio-Uomo-Mondo* (2004); *L'esperienza della vita. La mistica* (2005); *La gioia pasquale, La presenza di Dio and Maria* (2007); *Il Cristo sconosciuto dell'induismo* (2008).



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